

Cabinet

9 October 2025

Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan

For Decision

Cabinet Member:

Cllr R Biggs, Property & Assets and Economic Growth

Local Councillor(s):

All

Senior Leadership Team:

J Britton, Executive Director for Place Services

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Statutory Authority: Dorset Council

Report status: Public [Choose an item.](#)

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 'Get Britain Working' is a national initiative from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) seeking to promote higher employment and reduced economic inactivity, and support people to improve their skills to move into higher quality jobs.
- 1.2 All areas of England must develop local 'Get Britain Working' plans. Dorset Council, as Accountable Body, must lead the development of the plan across the Dorset Council (DC) and Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) geographies in partnership with BCP Council, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Integrated Care Board (ICB).
- 1.3 Approval of the Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan is required from all four organisations - DC, BCP, DWP and ICB. Representatives of all organisations sit on the Plan steering group and will be separately gaining approval for the Plan through their own governance routes.
- 1.4 Connect to Work (CTW) is a new DWP funded supported employment programme to support the Get Britain Working (GBW) strategy. The DWP has devolved funding to local areas via Accountable Bodies to implement the place based Connect to Work programme. Dorset Council has been allocated funds as the Accountable Body to oversee the delivery of the Connect to Work

service in the Dorset and BCP Council area. The programme is due to run through to 2030, and indicative funding has been advised through to the end of the programme.

- 1.5 Skills & Learning Adult Community Education (S&LACE) – the joint BCP Council and Dorset Council Adult Skills Service - has led the design and implementation of the delivery plan for Connect to Work for Dorset Council and BCP Council. S&LACE will manage the Connect to Work service, commissioning, contract managing and quality assuring suitable delivery partners in addition to direct delivery of supported employment activity across the county.
- 1.6 This Cabinet report seeks the approvals to implement Get Britain Working, and its first programme, Connect to Work, in the Dorset area.

2. Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the draft 'Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan' for publication
2. Delegates authority to the Executive Director for Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Property, Assets and Economic Growth and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education, and Skills, to undertake any minor changes to the Working Plan needed during its lifetime.
3. Delegates authority to the Executive Director for Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Property, Assets and Economic Growth and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education, and Skills, to assign any remaining funding from the Government allocation to deliver outcomes identified in the Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan.
4. Approves the Connect to Work Plan.
5. Delegates authority to the Executive Director for Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Property, Assets and Economic Growth and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education, and Skills, to undertake any minor changes to the Connect to Work Plan needed during its lifetime.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

- 3.1 The Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan (GD&BCPWP), and supporting Connect to Work programme, will enable Dorset Council to help address challenges related to labour market participation and progression.
- 3.2 In addition to being a government requirement, development and implementation of the Plan will help realise key ambitions of the Council's Plan and supporting Economic Growth Strategy and Digital Infrastructure and

Inclusion Strategy, particularly around productivity, investment and skills needed for both today's economy and the proposed future expansion of key sectors including clean energy.

4. Background

- 4.1 The Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan is a joint regional employment, health, and skills strategy, developed in response to the UK Government's Get Britain Working White Paper. The plan sets out how partners will work together to increase employment, reduce economic inactivity, address health-related barriers to work, and improve the quality of jobs across Dorset and the BCP area.
- 4.2 Developed collaboratively with Dorset Council, Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the Dorset Skills and Workforce Board the plan covers both Dorset Council and BCP Council areas. It provides an overview of current employment support activity, alongside an analysis of the local labour market, and highlights where new approaches are needed to respond to emerging challenges.
- 4.3 The plan also explains how local partners will align with and contribute to national, regional, and local priorities for inclusive growth, resilience, and prosperity. It supports the Government's ambition to achieve an 80% employment rate while ensuring that local residents and employers benefit from healthier, more sustainable, and more prosperous communities.

5 Key employment and labour market issues

- 5.1 The Dorset and BCP labour market reflects both opportunities and challenges. The economically active population (aged 16+) has steadily increased since 2004. This is driven by population growth, higher participation among older people (aged 65+), and increased participation by women. Growth has been stronger in the BCP area than in the Dorset Council area.
- 5.2 The workforce has an older profile than the national average: 38% of the economically active population are over 50, compared with 32% nationally. This trend creates implications for replacement demand in coming years.
- 5.3 Employment rates across Dorset and BCP have remained consistently above the national average. Levels of self-employment are higher than the national average, with men more likely than women to be self-employed. Similarly, part-time working is more common than reported nationally, particularly among women.
- 5.4 Despite these strengths, pay levels for full-time workers in the pan-Dorset area remain below the national average, with the gap more pronounced in

the Dorset Council area. Around 39,000 jobs locally pay below the 'Real Living Wage', disproportionately affecting part-time workers and women.

- 5.5 Unemployment in Dorset and BCP has historically been below the national average. However, post-pandemic trends saw unemployment rise above national levels in the BCP area. Rates have since fallen, reaching 2.8% in December 2023. Current claimant data shows higher unemployment among men, people under 40, and those in BCP.
- 5.6 Economic inactivity has traditionally been below the national average, but since the pandemic inactivity rates have risen more sharply. By March 2025, 94,300 people aged 16–64 (21%) were economically inactive. The reasons vary however key factors include long-term sickness/ill health and specific disadvantage including challenges for young people (18-24).
- 5.7 The Government's goal is for a thriving labour market where everyone has the opportunity for good work and to be able to get on in work, and where the ambition of an 80% employment rate is achieved. For Dorset and BCP this would involve having an additional c.18,500 people in work.
- 5.8 According to the Dorset Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), 26.4% (c. 24,900) of those who are economically inactive want to work (compared with 18% nationally), which indicates that from a resident perspective, there is motivation to achieve an 80% employment rate across the area.

6 The approach to Get Britain Working in Dorset and BCP

- 6.1 Get Britain Working is designed around system working, meaning different public services and partners join up instead of working in silos. With partnership at the core – the plan must be co-owned by Local Authorities, Job Centre Plus, Department for Work and Pensions and the NHS. Skills providers and employers/voluntary organisations are also key collaborators in the system.
- 6.2 This plan links to cross system working - such as health, caring, skills and transport – and seeks to align with other local strategies including Local Growth Plans, Local Skills Improvement Plans and the new 10 year health plan. The Plan proposes shared outcomes and accountability including higher employment rates, better jobs and reduced economic inactivity.
- 6.3 Currently a system of employment support is delivered via councils, Dorset HealthCare NHS Foundation Trust, Jobcentre Plus, adult learning providers, colleges, and independent training organisations. This ensures some residents can access help, when entering work for the first time, returning after a break, or overcoming health-related barriers.
- 6.4 The system includes supported employment, health-linked support, skills and training, and access to national programmes, and tries to create pathways into jobs. Whilst the system offers provision for some people,

there is little collaboration between providers, especially in commissioned activity, leading to duplication and gaps.

- 6.5 The system described above is fragmented, leading to duplication, confusion, and missed opportunities. By aligning social care, community, education, health and employment services, the offer could be more inclusive, person-centred, and focused on building a resilient local workforce and stronger communities.
- 6.6 To address this, the Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan recommends that systemic change is needed—shifting from a siloed approach to an integrated ecosystem with shared purpose. Key interventions developed through this approach could include a single front door with shared triage, joint governance through a pan-Dorset Work and Health Board, embedding employment into health pathways, and creating a unified employer gateway.
- 6.7 Services could also be rooted in high-need communities, with sector-specific pipelines aligned to skills priorities and flexible funds to remove practical barriers.
- 6.8 The Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan proposes an approach that looks to create a seamless, outcome-focused system that supports residents more effectively, strengthens employer engagement, and delivers healthier, more prosperous communities.
- 6.9 By working in partnership, the Plan can help tackle economic inactivity, address health-related barriers, elevate job quality, and foster inclusive growth across our region. Realising the ambitions of the Get Dorset & BCP Working Plan will strengthen families, support employers, and build resilient communities. This plan envisions a future where:
 - Every resident of working age has access to tailored employment support.
 - Services across health, skills, and employment are aligned and responsive.
 - Employers can tap into a motivated workforce.
 - Communities flourish with renewed confidence, purpose, and economic opportunity

7. Connect To Work

- 7.1 Connect to Work is the first DWP funded programme under the 'Get Britain Working' white paper. It aims to support disabled people, those with health conditions and people in disadvantaged groups, with multiple and complex barriers, to move into and sustain employment.
- 7.2 The pan Dorset area has a Connect to Work target to support up to 900 individuals a year into work, or to stay in work. The outcome must be good

quality paid work (not volunteering) and delivery must be based on high fidelity intensive supported employment models: either the Individual Placement Support (IPS) or Support Employment Quality Framework (SEQF). Self-employment is also a suitable outcome

- 7.3 To access Connect to Work funding, Accountable Bodies complete a Delivery Plan, setting out how they intend to implement and deliver their offer, across their Delivery Area.
- 7.4 The Plan development has been led by Skills & Learning Adult Community Education (S&LACE) as the shared adult education service for BCP Council and Dorset Council. BCP Council is the host authority and receives Department for Education skills grants on behalf of Dorset Council and BCP Council. It has shared governance arrangements, a local footprint across the whole county and already engages with potential Connect to Work participants so is well positioned to develop, manage and implement the service on behalf of both authorities
- 7.5 The funding value for the Connect to Work grant has been calculated using local demographic data and some adjustments for local factors such as rurality and seasonal employment patterns. This has generated a peak target of 900 residents a year to engage with pan Dorset, at a value of £3800 per resident onboard.
- 7.6 The programme supports economically inactive people into employment, or in some cases to sustain employment, in the local economy. The target participants are those with disabilities, health conditions, mental ill health or are neurodiverse.
- 7.7 The grant is being allocated to local authorities to design, deliver and quality assure a local supported employment programme that builds on other available local support and enables economically inactive residents to get and maintain employment.
- 7.8 Unlike other DWP programmes, Connect to Work is not simply about preparing people to apply for jobs. It's a Place, Train and Maintain model and provides a next step for those who want to be working, plus in-work support.
- 7.9 There is a strong focus on health and the NHS are working up plans that will support the GBW strategy with the aim of making employment a desired health outcome.

Connect to Work Delivery model

- 7.10 The programme will be delivered using two 'fidelity' models: The Individual Placement and Support model (IPS) and the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF). The Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model is effective in supporting those with health conditions or other

barriers to work. The Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) model is suited to those with complex needs such as learning disabilities or autism and includes more intensive support.

- 7.11 Delivery is due to commence in January 2026, with 60% of outputs delivered in the BCP area and 40% in the DC area. Delivery ramps up to a peak of 900 clients in each of FY 2028 and 2029.

8 Governance and Stakeholders

- 8.1 The Dorset Skills and Workforce Development Board (formerly the Dorset Skills Board) functions as the Steering Group for the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and provides governance for the Get Britain Working Plan and Connect to Work. The Board membership is required by government guidance to be representative of key stakeholders and includes Dorset Council, BCP Council, DWP, representatives from key industrial sectors, the ICB, and representation from local further and higher education providers.
- 8.2 To reflect the cross directorate coordination required within the Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan, the Dorset Council membership of the Dorset Skills and Workforce Development Board will be reviewed to determine what additional representation is required to ensure seamless council working on this Plan.
- 8.3 In undertaking the Get Britain Working Plan a working group was established comprising BCP Council, Dorset Council, Dorset Chamber, Skills & Learning (delivering the associated 'Connect to Work' proposals), Department of Work and Pensions and the Integrated Care Board. This group has engaged with local key stakeholders from the third sector, business groups and education and skills providers such as BCP Homewards; Community Action Network and Citizens Advice in the development of both Plans.
- 8.4 As Dorset council is the Accountable Body, reporting will be to Dorset Council via the Place Board.

9 Alternative options considered

- 9.1 All areas of England must develop local 'Get Britain Working' plans. Approving the GD&BCPWP enables DC (and BCP) to help address the challenges related to labour market participation and progression. The GD&BCPWP helps deliver key Council objectives.
- 9.2 Declining to submit a plan has been discounted as all areas must deliver a plan as required by UK government.

10 Legal considerations

- 10.1 DWP determines which authority is to be the Accountable Body – In this case Dorset Council. At present the only funding directly attached to Get Britain Working has been a grant for the development of the Plan.
- 10.2 A Service Level Agreement or MOU will be required between Dorset Council and BCP Council to ensure the associated grant for Connect to Work can be appropriately and legally transferred to BCP Council (host of Skills and Learning) to enable the direct delivery, programme management and commissioning, management and payment of delivery partners. While there is an overall agreement covering the functioning of Skills and Learning as a Joint Board, the funding from DWP is not covered by the original agreement.

11 Financial implications

- 11.1 The Government has provided Dorset Council, as Accountable Body, with £125,000 to develop the GBW Plan across Dorset Council and BCP Geographies. This has been used to finance work by Dorset Chamber and the two councils.
- 11.2. The Council has agreed to make a payment of £25,000 to BCP Council from the GBW funding to cover BCP officer involvement in the production of the GBW Plan.
- 11.3 There are no other financial implications for the GBW work. By producing the Plan, the Council will not be committing to deliver any further projects or result in any financial liabilities for the Council. Proposed projects within the plan will need to be funded by other funding streams or future UK Government funding.
- 11.4 The funding value for the Connect to Work grant is based on a formula of £3800 per resident onboard. Indicative grant values total £9.33 million by the end of FY 2030.

Table 1: Table of estimated client numbers and grant funding for Connect to Work

	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30	Total
Target starts	0	180	410	900	900	55	2445
Indicative grant value	£0.10m	£0.52m	£1.37m	£3.22m	£3.04m	£1.08m	£9.33m

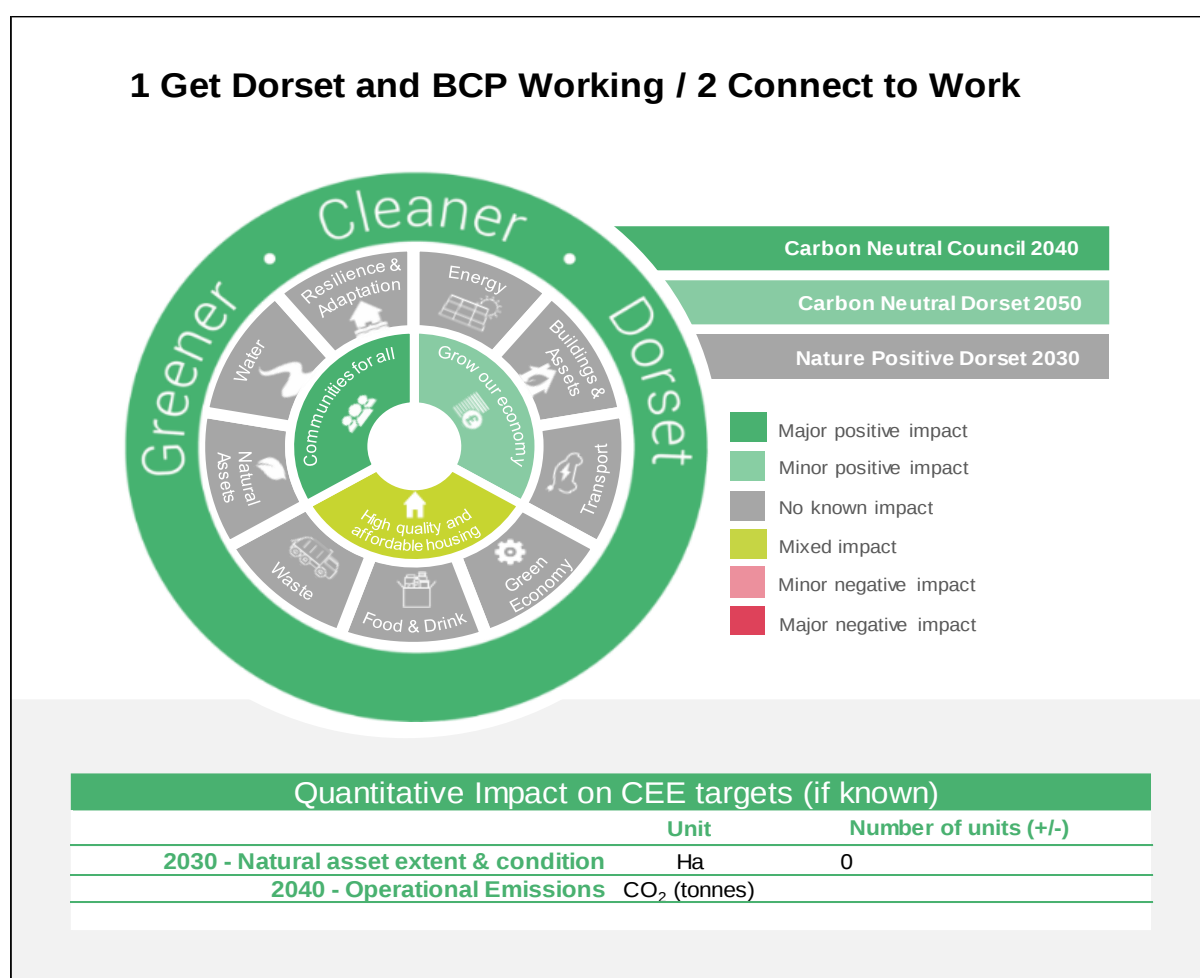
- 11.5 This is the first time that a DWP grant is coming directly to local authorities under the localism agenda, to develop local plans and services that support growth and employment in the area. The funds will be ringfenced for the delivery of the Connect to Work programme and as mentioned above will be

transferred to Skills and Learning, following approval of a Service Level Agreement, to manage the delivery of the project.

- 11.6 Additional staffing will be needed for Skills & Learning to manage and directly deliver a supported employment programme and to manage and quality assure delivery partners. Potential redundancy costs will be built in for the end of the programme in 2030 if further funding is not guaranteed. These have been included in the grant cost register.

12 Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

- 12.1 The climate decision wheel report shows moderate benefits. The main potential benefit will be opportunities for upskilling to the clean energy sector:



Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	No known impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact

Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	No known impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	No known impact

Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Grow our economy	minor positive impact
High-quality and affordable housing	neutral
Communities for all	strongly supports it

The climate wheel report shows no recommendations.

13 Well-being and health implications

- 13.1 The Plan will have a positive impact on the health and well-being of our residents through addressing exclusion from the labour market - including those with health conditions and/or caring responsibilities or lower skill levels, young people without essential skills and people trapped in insecure and poor quality jobs.

14 Other implications

- 14.1 None

15 Risk implications

- 15.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Low

16 Equalities

- 16.1 An EQIA Screening has been prepared for the Plan. Some aspects of the Connect to Work Plan are designed to positively impact groups of people with specific protected and non-protected characteristics, especially people with disabilities, and work is ongoing to map the national EQIA to the local context.

17 Appendices

- Get Dorset and BCP Working Plan
- Dorset Connect to Work Plan

- Dorset Skills and Workforce Development Group Membership

18. Background papers

None

19 Report sign-off

- 11.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)