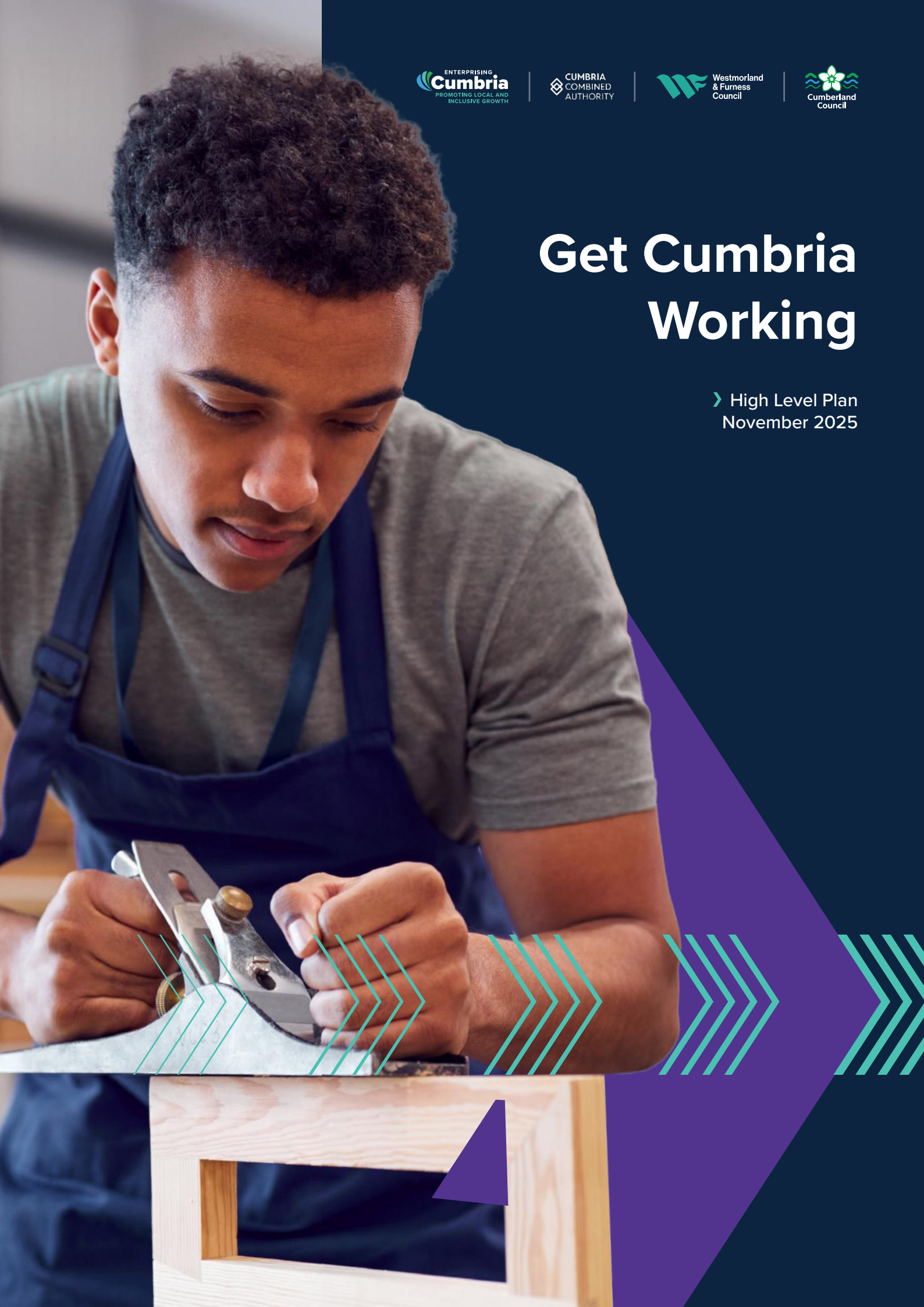


# Get Cumbria Working

› High Level Plan  
November 2025





# Foreword

As Leaders of Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council, we are pleased to present the first Get Cumbria Working Plan. The Plan sets out our approach to addressing economic inactivity and increasing labour supply, and represents a joint endeavour; not only for local authorities but our founding partners in the Integrated Care Boards (ICB) and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Plan will also be a key document for the new Cumbria Combined Authority as it establishes itself.

Our vision for the Get Cumbria Working Plan is to: ***unlock Cumbria's growth by enabling more residents, especially those facing the greatest barriers, to enter, remain and progress in good jobs, while improving health and wellbeing.***

We know that supporting more people into good quality work is important for our economy and that the proportion of our residents who are not in a job because of their health is too high. This constrains the capacity of our businesses to grow, as well as being detrimental for individuals, families and communities. Growth is also the main focus of our economic strategies at both a unitary council and Cumbria level; contributing to the government's growth mission.

The Get Cumbria Working Plan is a starting point for our joint work to increase labour supply in our county. Through collaborative action, the Plan will help to secure the best outcomes for Cumbria's people and achieve the target employment rate of 80% by 2029. Our objectives are to establish a 'no wrong door' system across public services; tackle systemic and structural challenges; and better co-ordinate employment support to fill gaps in provision.

Our Plan will be underpinned by four principles:

- **Collaboration:** sharing knowledge and experience and building strong foundations for systems change.
- **Partnership:** working together to deliver the Get Cumbria Working vision.
- **Participation:** empowering all partners to be engaged and heard.
- **Co-production:** creating person-centred systems and services based on lived experience that deliver the right support in the right way for all residents.

Implementation of the Get Cumbria Working Plan will be led by the new Work and Health Board, which includes representation from the councils, ICBs, and DWP, as well as the Council for Voluntary Service and Cumbria Social Enterprise Partnership, University of Cumbria, Cumbria Chamber of Commerce and a representative from the Economic Growth Board on behalf of employers.

We know that some of the issues addressed in the Plan are of long standing. However, we welcome the government's approach to bringing local partners together to take an evidence-based approach to collective action, and we are committed to the joint work required to Get Cumbria Working.



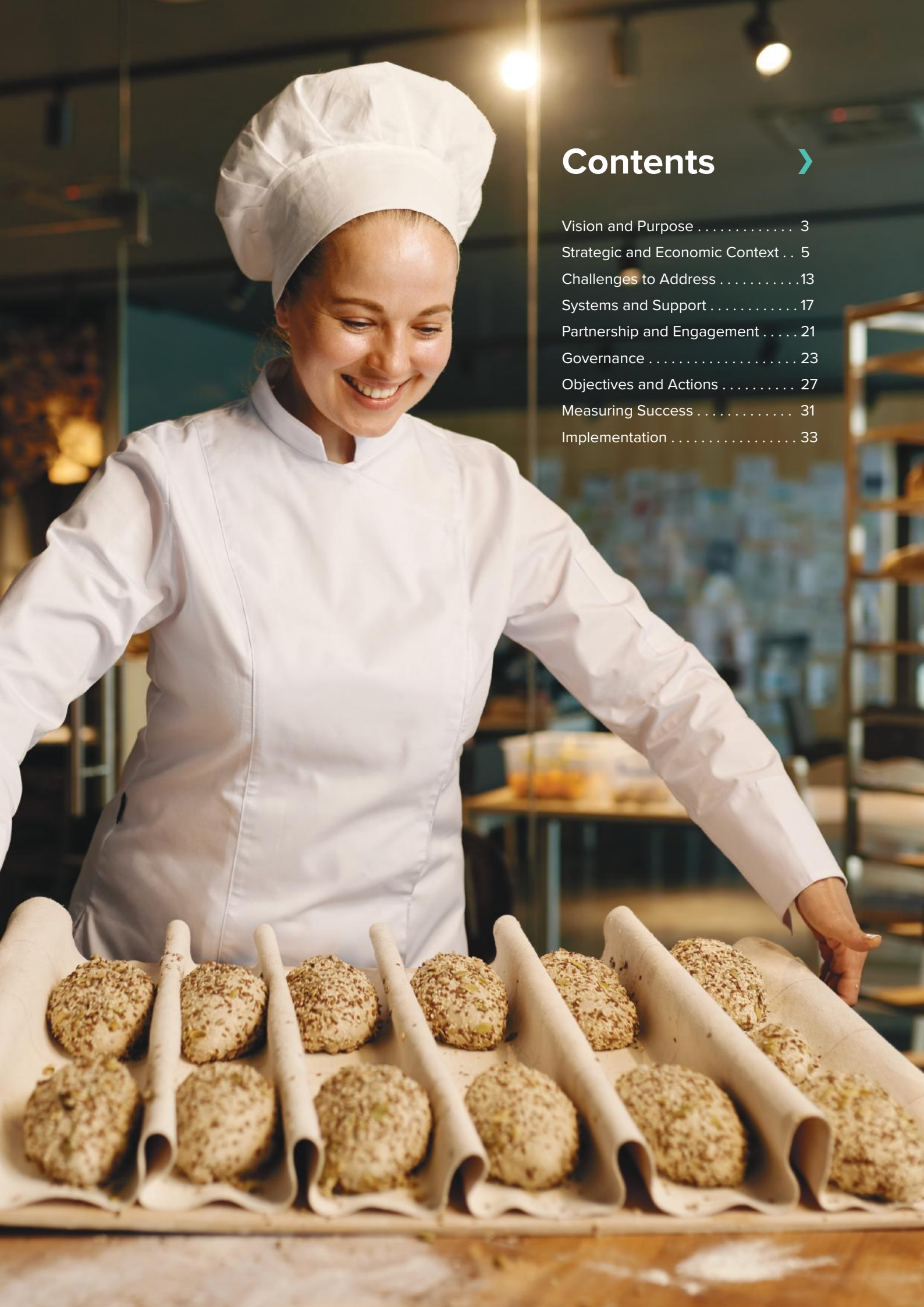
**Cllr Mark Fryer**

Leader of  
Cumberland Council



**Cllr Jonathan Brook**

Leader of Westmorland  
and Furness Council



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## 1. Vision and Purpose

*The Get Cumbria Working Plan will unlock Cumbria's growth by enabling more residents, especially those facing the greatest barriers, to enter, remain and progress in good jobs, while improving health and wellbeing.*







## 2. Strategic and Economic Context

Cumbria is a large and predominantly rural county in the North West of England, covering 2,614 square miles with a population of around 511,000<sup>1</sup>. The area is diverse, spanning a heritage city, industrial urban centres and market towns, three ports, an enterprise zone, and extensive rural communities, including two national parks and 180 miles of coastline.

### Labour Market and Economy

Cumbria has a £15bn economy and is governed by two of the UK's newest and largest unitary councils, together covering nearly half of the North West's land mass.

#### Economic Snapshot



Going for Growth: Cumbria's Economic Strategy 2025-2045 identifies a £3 billion productivity gap, with an economy held back by an under-representation of high-value sectors and a skills base not fully aligned with demand. Poor transport and digital connectivity compound these challenges.

Sector strengths include advanced manufacturing, clean energy and nuclear industries, defence, tourism, and food production, alongside emerging sectors such as robotics. Cumbria has a growing business base and plentiful job opportunities, with a job density higher than the national average, at 91 jobs for every 100 people.

<sup>1</sup>Population estimates by single year of age, ONS; Annual Population Survey, ONS



Cumbria has an employment rate that outperforms the national average and high levels of economic activity. However, many residents face significant barriers to labour market participation: in March 2025, there were an estimated 59,000 residents classified as economically inactive, accounting for 20.5% of the working age population, slightly below the English average of 21.2%. A significant proportion of residents hold low or no skills, experience socio-economic exclusion, deprivation in health and income, and live in poor quality housing. There are concentrations of deprivation in coastal and urban areas, and 8% of Cumbria's LSOAs are in the top 10% most deprived nationally, influencing quality of life. Enabling everyone in Cumbria to participate in and benefit from economic growth and jobs is a key ambition set out in policy.



## **91 jobs for every 100 people.**

*Cumbria has a growing business base and plentiful job opportunities, with a job density higher than the national average.*





A comprehensive baseline analysis established in a bespoke dashboard considers Cumbria's performance against a set of Get Britain Working Outcome Metrics and contextual indicators. The dashboard is complemented by a rich body of evidence on the socio-economic context in Cumbria, developed to support the development of economic strategies at the local and sub-regional level, complemented by targeted research. An overview summary of Cumbria's economy and labour market is provided below.

## Cumbria: Economic and Labour Market Overview

**Job posting led by Employment Activities (40% of top 10 Industries)**



**Total Employment Rose Modestly 2020-2023**

From 244,725 to 252,525 full-time equivalent jobs (+3.2%) driven by gains in manufacturing, health and accommodation and food services.



**High Employment Rate**  
78.4% Employment rate compared to 75.7% nationally



**Lower Claimant Count**  
2.2% WAP claiming compared with 3.7% nationally



**Rising Economic Inactivity since last year**  
57,700 economically inactive people in Cumbria (20% of WAP population)



**Demand for People-Centred Capabilities**  
Communication being the most demanded skills in jobs with management and customer service following



### Ageing Population

While all ages between 2019-2024 saw an average increase of 2.7% in population, the 65+ population grew by 8.0% compared to 1.2% of all other ages



### Higher Level of No Qualification

6.7% of WAP with no qualifications compared to nationally 6.5%



### Lower than Average Productivity per Hour but Fastly Growing

Current productivity levels per hour are £4 less than national output, however, growth in 4 years is 21.3% in Cumbria compared to 14.2% nationally



### Worse Health Outcomes

Higher than national average: 4.7% describing their health as bad while only 4.3% do nationally. Also a higher number of people stating they are disabled with 17% compared to average of 15%.



### Above Average Gender Pay Gap

Pay group in 2024 was roughly 6 percentage point above the national average. Cumbria gender pay difference for all employees is roughly £4 per hour.



### NEET 16-17yr Olds

374 people 16-17-year-olds classified as NEET equivalent to 3.5%



### Growing 65+ Population (Ageing Population)

While on average all ages grew by 2.3% this was brought up by the extremely high 6.9% growth in 65+ age group.



**Disclaimer:** When comparing local or regional figures to national averages, please note that smaller population sizes or sample sizes can result in higher variability and lower statistical confidence. This means that apparent differences may not always be statistically significant and should be interpreted with caution. See Appendix for more detail.

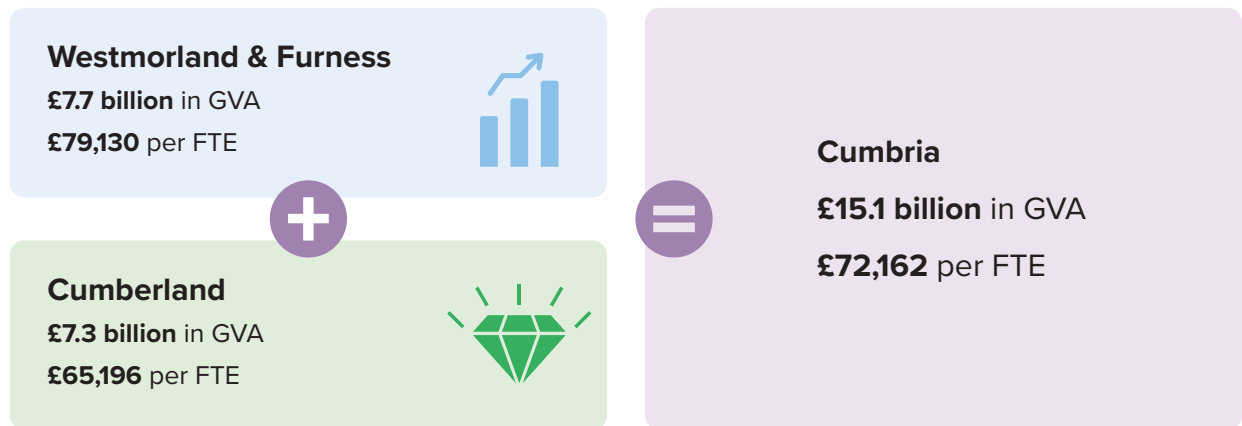
**Source:** Annual Population Survey, 2025; NEET Participation, DofE; Population estimates - local authority based by single year of age, ONS, 2024; Claimant count by sex and age, ONS; Census 2021



## Strengths and Assets

Cumbria has several strengths and assets that can be leveraged to support residents to progress into work and remain in work.

### A Growing Economy - Presenting Employment Opportunities



Source: Regional Gross Value Added 2023, ONS (2023 prices)

In 2023, Cumberland recorded £7.3 billion in GVA (£65,196 per FTE). Westmorland and Furness recorded £7.7 billion in GVA (£79,130 per FTE), with manufacturing a key contributor to economic output in both areas. Collectively, Cumbria's total GVA is projected to increase by £1.7 billion between 2024 and 2034, a growth of 15.9%, outpacing the UK average of 12.9%.<sup>2</sup>

### Future Demand for Labour

Major investment is taking place within Cumbria, which supports economic growth, safeguarding and creating jobs. This includes:

- Major investment by key employers associated with defence and energy security, including BAE Systems and Sellafield and their associated supply chains.
- Housing development, including large strategic sites such as St Cuthbert's Garden Village in Carlisle and Marina Village in Barrow.
- Strategic employment sites, such as Pioneer Park, Kingmoor Business Park, around the ports of Barrow and Workington, and Penrith 41.
- Infrastructure development, such as the Port of Workington and the dualling of the A66

<sup>2</sup>Economic Overview Oct 2024, Enterprising Cumbria - Cumbria projections developed with the aid of CEIER LEFM software 2024 (These data are not a forecast of what will happen, they are one scenario of what could happen based on a series of assumptions about the national/local economy. They should always be used with caution alongside other evidence.)

These are complemented by place-based investments helping to enhance quality of life, drive economic growth and support regeneration, facilitated by government funding such as Town Deal, Future High Street Fund, Coastal Communities, Levelling Up, Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal and Pride in Place.

According to DfE projections, 122,600 additional employees are required in Cumbria to meet expansion and replacement demand.

### Expansion Demand + Replacement Demand =



*Replacement demand accounting for 90% of the additional employees (most early retirements)*

Source: Labour market and skills projections: 2020 to 2035, DfE

### Supporting infrastructure for businesses and key sectors

Cumbria benefits from a substantial network of organisations that create supporting infrastructure for businesses, the VCSFE sector and other key sectors. These include Enterprising Cumbria, Cumbria CVS, and Cumbria Chamber of Commerce.

Sector-specific networks and organisations further add to the business support infrastructure in the region and an anchor network is emerging across the area. This builds on the existing Bay Anchor Network, which brings together partners from the NHS, Local Authorities, Education and major employers, and presents an opportunity to share best practice and to tailor procurement and social value commitments to the needs of the community.



## A testbed for innovation in service delivery to support economic participation

**WorkWell** in South Cumbria, a free, voluntary service to support people with health conditions to remain in work or re-enter work following a period of illness, a national **Health and Growth Accelerator pilot** delivering 'WorkWell' services in North Cumbria and **Welcome to Work**: in the Visitor Economy, delivered by Cumbria Tourism to support people who are economically inactive to find employment, are examples that demonstrate a clear aspiration to be a forward-thinking region that can embrace innovation in service delivery. There is a willingness in Cumbria to be a testbed for new approaches and initiatives.

## Shaping Local Response through Devolution

Cumbria is on the priority programme for devolution, which will enable the region to take on new powers, functions and funding to improve economic growth, infrastructure, and local development. The **Going for Growth: Cumbria Economic Strategy 2025-2045** provides the direction for Cumbria's collective efforts to unlock the full potential of its assets and address persistent barriers to growth and will form the basis of Cumbria's future devolution ambitions.

Devolution will play a crucial role in job creation through the attraction of investment and supporting businesses to thrive and grow. The devolution of future supported employment funding can play a vital role in reskilling and upskilling to address skill mismatches and gaps, and help disabled people, people with health conditions, and those with more complex barriers to find a suitable job and sustain work. It can also help those at risk of inactivity to remain in work and can play a key role in facilitating more effective partnership working to reform and drive improvements in public services, which can in turn better support inactive residents experiencing poor health.

## Strategic alignment

The **Get Cumbria Working Plan** aligns with the UK Government's **Plan for Change** to kickstart economic growth and raise living standards in every part of the UK, with more people in good jobs and improved employment prospects, skills and productivity; and with the Get Britain Working White Paper and its ambition to raise the national employment rate to 80%. Additionally, the UK Government's **Modern Industrial Strategy** explicitly links economic inactivity and low productivity. The Plan also reflects the findings of the **Mayfield Review**, published during the development of the Plan, which emphasises prevention, retention, and rapid rehabilitation.

Regionally, the Plan aligns with several strategies to address economic inactivity and drive long-term growth, including Going for Growth: Cumbria Economic Strategy 2025-2045, Cumbria Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), the local Council Plans and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies.

Apprenticeships  
take-up is strong,  
but graduate  
retention is weak





## 3 Challenges to Address

### Structural challenges





Cumbria's economy faces several structural challenges, including:

- **Population structure:** Cumbria's ageing population presents structural challenges to labour supply. Only 59.0% of residents are of working age. Rising early retirement and low employment among people aged over 50 years of age make it difficult to re-engage inactive individuals in work, limiting the available workforce and placing pressure on services and employers to adapt to demographic change
- **Affordability:** Despite lower average housing costs, areas like the Lake District face affordability pressures from second-home ownership and short-term lets. Insecure housing and low-paid work (18.3% below Living Wage vs 15.9% in England) limit access to stable employment, and Cumbria's household income is below the England average. Poor housing quality contributes to ill health, while insecure housing and low-paid work limit access to stable employment.
- **Skills mismatches and gaps:** Cumbria faces significant skills mismatches, with only 38.8% of residents holding degree-level qualifications compared to 47.2% nationally. This limits access to higher-skilled roles and constrains economic growth. Demand for advanced qualifications is rising, and projections show a shift toward higher-level skills by 2035, while mid- and lower-level qualifications remain stable or decline. Combined with below-average productivity in key sectors, these skill gaps present structural challenges that hinder competitiveness, workforce mobility, and the county's ability to attract and retain talent.
- **Disability employment gap and poor health:** Poor health is a major barrier to work in parts of Cumbria, with long-term sickness accounting for 43.0%. Cumbria's disability employment gap remains significantly wider than the national average, reflecting persistent barriers to inclusion and the need for targeted support and workplace accessibility.
- **Rurality, transport and access:** Cumbria's rural geography and limited transport infrastructure restrict access to jobs, education, and essential services. With 58.0% of residents commuting by car, reliance on private vehicles is high due to limited public transport options.
- **Youth unemployment:** Youth employment in Cumbria is strong at 75.9%, driven by high apprenticeship demand. However, 1,210 young claimants and 374 NEETs highlight ongoing challenges in inclusion and opportunity.

## Key groups requiring support

The Get Cumbria Working Plan identifies five key groups identified as being at most risk of economic inactivity and lower levels of labour market participation. Focusing on these groups enables implementation efforts to be directed where they are most needed, and where impact can be greatest, to increase employment participation and tackle economic inactivity. These groups face significant barriers and challenges to labour market participation, and it is recognised that people can sit in one or more of these groups.

### Get Cumbria Working Priority Cohorts

<p><b>Economically Inactive</b></p> 	<p><b>People with Disabilities and Health Conditions</b></p> 
<p><b>Young People and NEET</b></p> 	<p><b>Older Workers</b></p> 
<p><b>Other Disadvantaged Groups</b></p> 	

### People who are economically inactive

- Nearly 1 in 5 economically inactive people say they want to work
- Roughly 13.0% of working-age women are economically inactive (and 10% of men)
- Women account for 58% of all claimants of benefits related to economic inactivity, despite comprising only half of Cumbria's population
- Many vulnerable groups are more likely to face economic inactivity



## People with disabilities and health conditions

- Mental health is the leading cause of economic inactivity in Cumbria. 54.0% of Employment Allowance (EA) claimants cite mental health as their primary condition
- Anxiety and depression are rising, especially among younger people
- Long NHS waiting times and limited local support make it harder to return to work
- There is a large disability employment gap (the difference in employment rates between disabled and non-disabled people)
- Employers, especially SMEs, can struggle to sustain support, increasing the risk of job loss
- Employer awareness of adjustments and support available to them as employers is uneven.

## Young people and NEET

- There is generally high youth employment overall, but a high risk of long-term wage “scarring” for young people and those who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)
- Apprenticeships take-up is strong, but graduate retention is weak
- Young women with caring responsibilities are particularly at risk of economic exclusion
- The impact of the pandemic has exacerbated attendance and attainment issues, increasing the risk of NEET status for the current generation
- Access to transport, housing and mental health provision is a significant barrier for young people.

## Older workers

- 22.0% of economic inactivity in Cumbria is due to retirement
- Many people aged 50-64 leave work due to ill health, caring or redundancy
- A lack of flexible employment makes it difficult for older workers to remain in or return to employment
- Retention and return is also impacted by poor health
- There is a risk that people will need to accept more insecure or lower-paid work after redundancy.

## Other disadvantaged groups

- Carers, women, survivors of domestic abuse, and veterans are significant groups in Cumbria that face distinctive structural/systemic barriers requiring tailored support and flexible work options.



Young women with caring responsibilities are particularly at risk of economic exclusion.



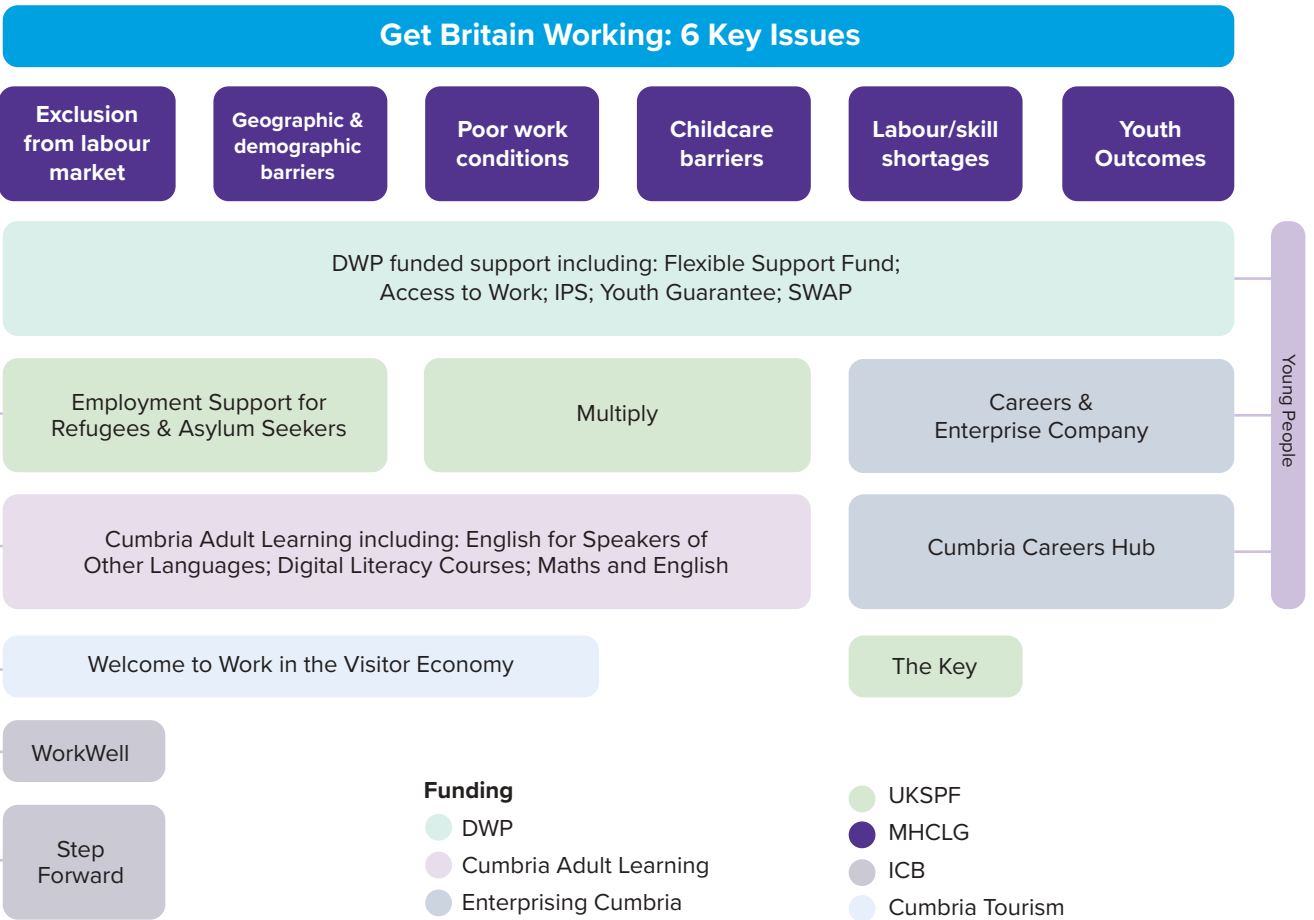
# 4 Systems and Support

An initial mapping exercise has been carried out, which identified a wide range of programmes currently in operation across Cumbria to support individuals with employment, skills development, and access to work. These include both nationally commissioned services and locally delivered initiatives. We recognise the landscape is complex, and this mapping is considered a starting point only to help shape this Plan.

## Existing programmes

The Jobcentre Plus Offer provides personalised advice and support to help people find and sustain employment, aligning with the Government’s strategy for economic growth and poverty reduction. Central to this are Work Coaches, who offer tailored, work-focused guidance and, where possible, support claimants throughout their journey to develop skills, find jobs, and access disability-friendly employers. Jobcentres also deliver targeted help through a wide range of specialist roles.

### Initial Mapping of Systems and Support Mechanisms in Cumbria



Not all six key Get Britain Working issues are equally addressed by the current provision. Existing support is inconsistent or has gaps for some key groups. For example, the key issue of childcare availability disproportionately impacts women, has fewer services currently supporting it, mostly through broad programmes such as those provided by Cumbria Adult Learning.

Young people have more and more dedicated support services currently available. For example, the Cumbria Careers Hub provides tailored support to improve youth outcomes in Cumbria. Development of future support will need to be cognisant of the inconsistency of the current framework of support to ensure that key groups are supported, to mitigate the risk that some people will 'slip through the net'.

## Planned programmes

Connect to Work is a programme which will be delivered across Cumbria by Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council, in collaboration with Enterprising Cumbria, funded by the Department of Work and Pensions. This will support people into sustained employment through a programme of support, including actions such as supporting a joined-up healthcare and employment support offer. The programme is currently being designed by Enterprising Cumbria and the respective local authorities and will launch in January 2026.

## Proposed programmes

The Get Britain Working Paper sets out the Government's commitment to piloting new approaches and programmes to address economic inactivity, including Economic Inactivity Trailblazers, Youth Trailblazers, and Health & Growth Accelerators. The imminent revision of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and the journey to devolution also create opportunities to develop new Cumbria-wide approaches and provision, and also to mitigate against short-term funding that is ending in 2026 for a number of services.

With the appropriate investment and support, Cumbria is well placed to deliver additional pilot activity and contribute to learning, having already demonstrated an appetite for innovation and willingness to be a testbed for new approaches.

The Youth Guarantee is a new Department for Work and Pensions initiative aimed at ensuring young people aged 18–21 have access to employment, education or training opportunities, as well as smoothing the transition between employment to prevent young people from becoming NEET. Support includes paid work placements, training opportunities, free travel passes, mental health support, and money advice. The Youth Guarantee is currently being piloted through regional trailblazers, with £45 million allocated nationally to test and refine delivery models, with vulnerable groups such as care leavers targeted, aiming to remove barriers to participation in work and learning. Although there is no timeline for the establishment of a Youth Guarantee in Cumbria, there is potential for thousands of young people to benefit from this in due course.



## Collaborative capacity

A new Work and Health Board brings together councils, ICBs, DWP, business/anchors, HE/FE, and VCFSE. The model emphasises parity across rural/urban areas, clearer employer engagement (through ERBs and sector bodies), and stronger data-sharing and commissioning alignment as Cumbria transitions to a Combined Authority.

Cumberland Council's preventative approach focuses on early intervention and holistic support to address barriers to employment before they escalate, while Westmorland and Furness Council's Community Power strategy encourages co-production with communities and VCFSE partners to improve outcomes and wellbeing.

Strategic alignment is further supported by structures such as the Cumbria Economic Growth Board, Health and Wellbeing Board, ICBs, and the Employment Support and Skills Group. Cumbria CVS plays a vital role in coordinating third sector involvement through specialist networks and the Cumbria Third Sector Network, which has a mature relationship with public sector partners. Barrow Rising, a partnership between Central Government, Westmorland and Furness Council, and BAE Systems, exemplifies place-based collaboration through its 10-year regeneration strategy for Barrow-in-Furness, which aligns with the Get Britain Working Plan.

Employer engagement is also a priority, with the Cumbria Chamber of Commerce playing a central role in business development and the LSIP. Large employers in key sectors such as advanced manufacturing, energy, and defence are recognised as key influencers and anchor institutions, essential to shaping the local labour market and economic strategy.



## 50-64

Many people aged 50-64 leave work due to ill health, caring or redundancy



## Capacity and capability challenges

- There is a key challenge in delivering accessible services with **parity across the region**, due to the mix of urban and rural geographies and existing issues with poverty, transport and access to services. This increases the risk of gaps in provision developing, with rural / remote areas at greater risk of non-provision.
- There is some potential **overlap** with the geographical boundaries for programmes such as Connect to Work and IPSPC in North Cumbria. There needs to be agreement about the cohort groups each programme will focus on, and clarity on geographical boundaries.
- **Employer engagement** across the region is fragmented and lacks coordination. Currently, multiple providers are engaging with employers, who have a limited understanding of the complex funding landscape.
- Both small and large businesses are key actors in supporting people into employment and to remain in employment, and each can present **specific challenges in offering support to employees**. For example, small businesses often lack the resources or capacity to provide occupational health services, and large businesses can lack flexibility and personalisation in the delivery of such services. This is compounded by a lack of knowledge and understanding amongst employers about the help that is available to them and to their employees.
- There is a need for employers and support services to **understand employment as a positive health outcome**, which requires a significant information and communications effort, and a shared vision of what this means for Cumbria and its residents.
- **Mental health** is a prevailing concern. There is a perception that instances of poor mental health are increasing, and that this can often be hidden. Similarly, neurodiversity can often be unrecognised. This means that often necessary support is not identified or implemented, both within and out of the workplace.

## System and cultural barriers to collaboration

- Governance structures to support the Get Britain Working Plan in Cumbria, whilst built on strong foundations, are **immature**, and there is a need for partners to be flexible and adaptive in approach whilst ensuring the aims and objectives of the Plan are met.
- With **no Cumbria-wide engagement mechanism** currently in place, there is significant untapped opportunity in the Anchor institutions in Cumbria, which includes both large employers and organisations such as local authorities, NHS and FE and HE providers.
- Commissioning processes across the local authorities and ICBs are **fragmented and delivered in isolation**. This issue is compounded by short-term funding cycles which limits long-term planning and coordination.
- **Data sharing systems and protocols** present a potential barrier to service collaboration and integration. The inability to share data appropriately limits the information available to services to enable effective supports, signposting and referrals for individuals. This in turn slows down or prevents access to appropriate supports for individuals. It also impacts on the robustness and extent of data available for decision making, monitoring and review purposes.



## 5 Partnership and Engagement

Get Cumbria Working is an ambitious plan that requires collaboration, cooperation and coordination across **all key partners** to ensure effective and impactful delivery. Only through shared accountability and responsibility will the Get Cumbria Working Plan lead to long-term change.

### Engagement to date

In the development of the Get Cumbria Working Plan, views from a broad range of key stakeholders, groups and organisations have been sought through a variety of engagement mechanisms. Between March and October 2025, an extensive programme of stakeholder engagement took place in Cumbria to obtain views and socialise thinking on the approaches to inform initiatives such as Connect to Work, strategies such as Get Cumbria Working, and economic inactivity more broadly. This included a series of targeted 121s and small-group interviews, and a stakeholder workshop to consider key Get Cumbria Working priorities, challenges and approaches to addressing these.

This was supplemented by a series of deep dive interviews with key stakeholders on the topic of economic inactivity to inform understanding of the causes, drivers and impacts of economic inactivity in Cumbria.

A series of 121s was held with employers and business intermediary organisations to understand the impacts of economic inactivity on employers, and how they are responding to this.

In July 2025, Enterprising Cumbria, in partnership with Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council, hosted a market engagement event for the Connect to Work Programme, where providers, employers and partners came together to consider their role in addressing local challenges.

Residents experiencing economic inactivity were engaged through an anonymous survey and 121 and small-group interviews. The South Lakeland Poverty Truth Commission also contributed to this process.

### Approach to partnership working

With a Cumbria-wide focus, Enterprising Cumbria has led the development of the Get Cumbria Working Plan, working closely with officers from Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council. This core team has enabled engagement and consultation with those who deliver employability and skills services directly related to Get Cumbria Working, and engagement with services providing health-based interventions and support and representing specialist areas.

Engaging with employers has been key to developing an understanding of the demand for labour, their appreciation of economic inactivity and the barriers to participation in Cumbria, and the impacts of this on businesses.



## Implementation, delivery and review

The Work and Health Board will oversee the implementation, delivery and review of the Get Cumbria Working Plan and engage with a wide range of partners through employer representative bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce, and new mechanisms and pathways such as the Get Cumbria Working consultation panel. There are several partners that the board will engage:

- **People with lived experience** are core partners. Work is underway to establish an appropriate mechanism that will ensure lived experience is integrated at all levels of planning and delivery, including the Work and Health Board.
- **Employers** are also critical partners in implementation. It is clear from the engagement that has taken place to inform the development of this Plan that there is a mixed understanding of economic inactivity and employability and skills services in Cumbria, as well as a wide range of approaches to supporting people move into or remain in work. We understand that employers in Cumbria's key sectors feel under pressure for a variety of reasons, some of which can only be addressed at the UK Government level through policy changes (for example, changes proposed by the new Employment Rights Bill), but we need to consider ongoing employer engagement for the work and health agenda. Westmorland Family Group provides employer representation on the Work and Health Board.
- Engagement with the wide network of **VCFSE and funded services** across Cumbria will be shaped and driven by the Work and Health Board, but requires specific coordination locally, both Cumbria-wide and within each local authority area.
- **DWP** will be critical to the implementation of the Get Cumbria Working Plan. DWP have been involved as a key stakeholder from the very early stages of developing the Plan and will continue to engage through the Work and Health Board, shaping local engagement and delivery through the Jobcentre Plus network.
- **NHS** Health services will be engaged through the relevant ICB.
- **Cumbria Chamber of Commerce** is a key partner in Get Cumbria Working and leads on the development of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). This provides a route to engagement with skills providers and an opportunity to align activities.



## 6 Governance

Delivering the Get Cumbria Working Plan will require a strategic, unified and integrated approach based on a shared commitment and understanding between all partners. There is a clear Cumbria-wide appetite to work more closely and build on positive learning from the Barrow Rising partnership model. This underpins the principles and approach outlined in this section.

Governance arrangements are likely to evolve as the Plan embeds and structures are adjusted.

### A changing context

In October 2025, Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council gave final approval to the UK Government's devolution proposals, meaning a Combined Authority for Cumbria will be established in 2026, with mayoral elections taking place in 2027.

The current governance structure has therefore been established with the understanding that there will be significant changes locally over the next two years, and it is designed to be responsive to these changes, with minimum disruption to delivering the Plan.

### Governance overview

The current proposed Governance Model is designed to be streamlined and inclusive. It comprises three key groups:

- **Joint Executive Committee (JEC)** (Cumberland and Westmorland & Furness Councils). There is currently a proposal under consideration to extend the powers of the JEC to support the transition to a Mayoral Combined Authority.
- **Work and Health Board**, with ownership and oversight of the Get Cumbria Working Plan and associated activity. It will provide advice to the JEC on matters of labour supply and options to overcome any constraints.
- **Economic Growth Board**, working alongside the Work and Health Board. The Economic Growth Board has oversight of Going for Cumbria's Going for Growth Economic Strategy and provides advice to the JEC on matters of labour demand and areas of growth and opportunity.

In addition to this, the Connect to Work Delivery Plan for Cumbria proposes the establishment of an employer engagement forum, which will inform a wider consulting panel, to ensure inclusive input and feedback. A separate forum to engage communities and people with lived experience will also be established.



A lack of flexible employment makes it difficult for older workers.

## Role of the Work and Health Board

The primary role of the Work and Health Board is to provide leadership and oversight on matters contained in the Get Cumbria Working plan. The Board will monitor the delivery of associated programmes such as Connect to Work, and others that may be commissioned by the government under the Get Britain Working strategy.

## Membership of the Work and Health Board

The Work and Health Board is a new structure, and as such, membership is still evolving to a degree. However, as a formal partnership of local stakeholders, it includes representation from Cumberland and Westmorland & Furness Councils, ICBs covering Cumbria, Directors of Public Health, Jobcentre Plus, The Chamber of Commerce, the University of Cumbria, Cumbria CVS and representation from the Economic Growth Board to ensure alignment between the two Boards.

Consideration is being given to how the burgeoning Anchors network in Cumbria can have an effective voice within the Work and Health Board, which will specifically reflect the Anchors agenda. Ensuring lived experience is represented within the Board is also being explored.

## Get Cumbria Working Consulting Panel

The consulting panel comprises two elements: an Employers Forum and a Communities Forum:

- The Employers Forum will be facilitated by the Connect to Work Partnership Manager and will build on good practice and existing engagement routes. The forum will therefore not be a discrete, new entity. Engagement mechanisms will be flexible to minimise the burden, particularly on SMEs. Employers will be engaged using existing networks.
- The Communities Forum will be led by the VCFSE sector, where there is substantial experience to build on to develop this. People with lived experience should be involved in co-producing how this forum will operate.



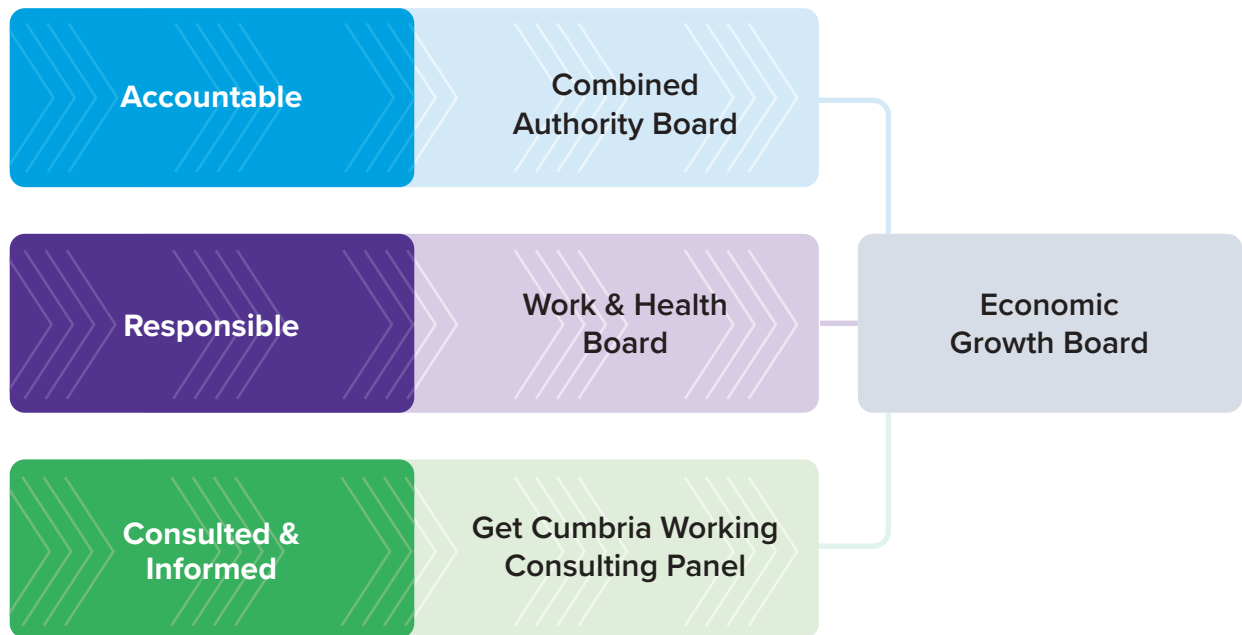
## Looking to the Future

The proposed structure going forward is designed to align with the requirements of the Mayoral Combined Authority that will be established:

- Cumbria Combined Authority Board (strategic)
- Cumbria Work and Health Board (delivery) – this will be maintained going forward
- CGBW Consulting Panel (informed by relevant fora for employers, community, lived experience)
- Future alignment and relationship with the Economic Growth Board is to be defined.

### Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed

Governance of the Cumbria Get Britain Working Plan will adhere to a RACI framework (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed):



**Responsible.  
Accountable.  
Consulted.  
Informed.**





# 7 Objectives and Actions

## Objectives of the Get Cumbria Working Plan

### Establish a ‘no wrong door’ system:

Develop an integrated approach where individuals can access employment support and advice from any point of entry, such as GPs, Job Centres, or libraries, ensuring their needs are understood and addressed efficiently, regardless of where they first seek help.

### Tackle structural and systemic challenges:

Identify and address the underlying structural issues (like housing, transport, and labour market) and systemic problems (such as childcare and treatment waiting lists) that hinder employment, by commissioning and delivering effective programmes and sharing insights with relevant authorities.

### Co-ordinate the employment support system to fill gaps in provision:

Improve partnership working and establish a shared outcomes framework across the employment support system so that gaps in provision can be identified; take a ‘test and learn’ approach to build on good practice in considering how to meet needs, including through piloting initiatives such as resource pooling.

## Action Plan (2025/26-2027/28)

By April 2028, we expect work on the Get Cumbria Working agenda to have had the following impacts:

- The Work and Health Board is fully established and resourced with an agreed shared outcomes framework that is driving a fully integrated approach to employment support across local authority, health and government service delivery.
- The Work and Health Board has led work across partner organisations to address structural and systemic challenges, with evidence of tangible changes.
- Employers of all sizes understand how they can create more inclusive workplaces and increasing numbers of employers are taking steps to do so.

### Strategic Enabler Actions

Strategic enabler actions are central to the development of the partnership and the creation of a new employment support system. They represent a set of fundamental actions that will improve system leadership, governance, accountability and engagement. These actions focus on the role played by the Work and Health Board.



Theme	Actions	Lead / Partners / timeline
<b>Developing Governance Capacity and System Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a shared outcomes framework to articulate and define roles and responsibilities of partners</li> <li>• Utilising innovation to underpin partnership integration and collaboration: develop transformation approach and agree starting points for alignment and integration among partners.</li> <li>• Explore further the creation of ‘no-wrong door’ principle: creation of shared data systems, performance monitoring, case management using select test and learn existing initiatives i.e. Community Hub.</li> <li>• Development of shared outcomes framework</li> </ul>	Work and Health Board, Strategic Leaders Group. <b>Q1 26/27</b>
<b>Partnerships and Engagement (VCFSE, Employer and lived experience)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Work and Health Board Consulting Panel is established</li> <li>• VCSE and Employer/Business partners are engaged via the Consulting Panel</li> <li>• The Work and Health Board appoints an Anchors representative</li> <li>• Lived experience representation is appointed to the Work &amp; Health Board</li> <li>• The Work and Health Board facilitates capacity building and training for all Board representatives to support lived experience contributions</li> </ul>	Work and Health Board, member organisations. <b>Q4 25/26</b>
<b>Current System Capacity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed mapping of current provision, building on initial mapping exercise</li> <li>• Comprehensive review of system capacity and workforce, based on mapping.</li> <li>• Detailed mapping of service user journeys within the current system</li> </ul>	Work and Health Board, member organisations. <b>Q4 25/26</b>
<b>Options on Future System Design, with a particular focus on addressing mental health challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building on detailed mapping exercise, consider options for any gaps in provision.</li> <li>• Options will include the assessment of feasibility on topics including development of workforce, service reconfiguration, commissioning, long-term funding and the shared outcomes frameworks, and opportunities to take a more strategic approach to Social Value commitments.</li> <li>• Options will also include impact of innovative models that are appropriate to Cumbria’s context, such as the proposed Natural Health Service.</li> </ul>	Work and Health Board, Strategic Leaders Group. <b>Q3 26/27</b>



## Programme Delivery Actions

Delivery actions will require effective partnership working, collaboration, and influence, and are included here to illustrate the scale of the challenge.

Theme	Actions	Lead / Partners / timeline
<b>Addressing Wider Structural Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Labour Market – Based on insight from providers and partners, the Work and Health Board will work with LSIP partners and the Economic Growth Board to strengthen and increase provision and availability of entry level jobs across Cumbria.</li> </ul>	Economic Growth Board, working with Work and Health Board and LSIP Steering Group <b>Annual reporting</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transport – Work with partners to review current voucher schemes to ensure alignment with current GBW priority groups</li> </ul>	Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Councils; Cumbria Combined Authority. private and third sector partners <b>Q4 26/27</b>
<b>Addressing Systemic problems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Childcare – Work with partners to ensure the sufficiency of childcare places is reviewed, taking account of the needs/barriers and challenges faced by those with low labour participation or inactive</li> </ul>	Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Councils (part of Best Start in Life government target) <b>Q3 26/27</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using a “lessons learned” approach, develop recommendations around future integration of services based on the impact of Connect to Work and WorkWell initiatives</li> </ul>	Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Councils, ICBs, and delivery partners <b>Q2 26/27</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business Support – working closely with Economic Growth Board and Local Authorities, support the development of information and guidance for SMEs around employment support and the needs of key groups</li> </ul>	Cumbria Combined Authority, Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Councils, Economic Growth Board, CCoC. <b>Q2 26/27</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use the proposed introduction of V-Levels as an opportunity to explore the co-delivery of employment support solutions for adults and NEETs &amp; Young People returning to education.</li> </ul>	Cumbria Combined Authority, Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Councils. <b>Q4 26/27</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of Short-Course funding pots using Growth &amp; Skills Levy to develop courses for leaders &amp; managers on Healthy Workplaces.</li> </ul>	Cumbria Combined Authority <b>Q4 26/27</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress development of a ‘Good Work Charter’ for Cumbria based on ‘good’ work (including flexibility, security, employee voice, development), recruitment, equality and diversity, and employee wellbeing.</li> </ul>	Strategic Leaders Group, Economic Growth Board <b>Q4 25/26</b>

Theme	Actions	Lead / Partners / timeline
<b>Deliver Targeted Interventions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current delivery of targeted interventions is maintained</li> <li>• Performance, impact and associated information is shared with Work and Health Board on six-monthly basis. Reports should include identification of challenges, trend changes and service satisfaction to inform design and delivery of future interventions</li> </ul>	Work and Health Board <b>Ongoing plus bi-annual reporting</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch the national Health and Growth Accelerator pilot in North Cumbria and maintain delivery of WorkWell in South Cumbria</li> <li>• Encourage collaboration between the two 'WorkWell' initiatives underway / being launched in Cumbria to share effective practice on delivery models and impact on target groups to support future system design</li> </ul>	North East and North Cumbria ICB and Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB <b>Ongoing</b> (while WorkWell funding maintained) <b>Bi-annual reporting</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch Cumbria Connect to Work in January 2026, providing employability support to people with disabilities, health conditions or other barriers. Connect to Work will deliver Individual Placement and Support (IPS) and the five stages of the Supported Employment model for Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF). Key target groups will include carers and veterans, survivors of domestic abuse, people with drug and alcohol dependence, those experiencing homelessness, ex-offenders, and refugees</li> </ul>	Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Councils <b>Q4 25/26</b> <b>Bi-annual reporting</b>
<b>Developing new solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an approach to organise the identification, assessment and approval of new projects, programmes and initiatives to address economic inactivity and low labour participation.</li> <li>• Identify and assess new projects, programmes and initiatives</li> </ul>	Work and Health Board <b>Q1 27/28</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilisation of new Family Hubs for identification and early intervention with families at risk of inactivity or lower labour participation.</li> </ul>	Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Councils, partner agencies <b>Q2 26/27</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore development of Multi-Agency Teams (NHS, JCP, LAs) that undertake data-led interventions in specific neighbourhoods, utilising the roll out of existing initiatives such as Community Hubs, Youth Hubs and Family Hubs to test and learn to support design of the 'no wrong front door' approach in Cumbria.</li> </ul>	Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Councils, Strategic Leaders Group <b>Q2 26/27</b>



## 8 Measuring Success

Principal outcomes from the Get Cumbria Working Plan will be:

Theme	Outcome
<b>People &amp; Places</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Higher employment participation across both local authority areas</li><li>• Reduced health-related inactivity</li><li>• Narrowed disability and gender gaps</li><li>• Improved youth participation in education, employment and training</li></ul>
<b>System &amp; employers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Functioning, inclusive governance</li><li>• Governance structure supported by data-sharing and continuous improvement processes</li><li>• Healthier workplaces at scale, especially within SMEs.</li></ul>
<b>Economy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased real household incomes</li><li>• Increased productivity</li><li>• Improved retention of the working-age population</li></ul>

A proposed detailed outcomes framework has been developed to support the Government's ambition of an 80% national employment rate. While core Get Britain Working metrics are defined nationally and monitored by the DWP, local labour markets need tailored frameworks to reflect their unique context. The methodology therefore reconciles national metrics with local priorities, using robust local evidence to monitor progress in improving the support system, addressing local labour market challenges, and Get Britain Working outcomes.

### Monitoring Get Cumbria Working

The Work and Health Board will be responsible for monitoring and reporting on Get Cumbria Working progress, outputs and outcomes. There will be quarterly monitoring of progress and performance using the Get Britain Working Outcomes Indicators and the local outcomes framework.



## Review and Evaluation of the Get Cumbria Working Plan

Preparing the Get Cumbria Working Plan has been a collaborative process that has built and strengthened relationships. The accountable body will oversee a light-touch review of it after 12 months working with the Work and Health Board. This process will review the new and emerging context, the Plan's purpose and strategic goals, policy alignment, alignment with need at the review point, and operational aspects to inform the future. This review will allow the Get Cumbria Working Plan to adjust to and maximise opportunities of devolution.

After 24 months, there will be a formal, external process and impact evaluation and the Evaluation Report will be published and shared. It will include a summary document suitable for non-specialist audiences.





## 9 Implementation

Delivering this Plan will rely upon the rapid alignment of the partners within the current system, and an understanding of the resources and capacity available across the partnership. The first step is expected to bring the partnership together via the Work and Health Board to ascertain each partner's current delivery of services, available resources, workforce capacity, and to collectively agree on the transformation journey and the commitment of each partner.

### Key Milestones – Year 1:

Theme	Milestone	Description
<b>Q4 2025</b>	Establish Programme Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Formalise the Work and Health Board's terms of reference, membership and associated Consulting Panel, and decision-making protocols</li></ul>
<b>Q4 2025 – Q1 2026</b>	Raise awareness of the Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Deliver presentations and briefings to inform partner organisations and broader stakeholders about the plan, emphasising the critical need for aligning policies to enable successful implementation</li></ul>
<b>Q1 2026</b>	Develop a Forward Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Co-produce a 2-year forward plan including meeting cadence, thematic priorities, and key deliverables aligned to priority actions.</li><li>Develop a shared outcomes framework, data sharing protocols, and embed insight and intelligence functions</li></ul>
<b>Q1–Q3 2026</b>	Facilitate Development Sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Run quarterly workshops to build shared understanding of roles, responsibilities, and cross-sector collaboration</li><li>Build capacity and provide training for Board representatives / Consulting Panel to support lived experience contributions</li></ul>
<b>Q4 2026–2027</b>	Programme Delivery & Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Implement priority actions, monitor progress, and adjust based on feedback and performance data</li></ul>



## Achieving the goals of the plan relies on several critical enablers:

- Strong governance and effective system leadership are essential to drive integrated delivery and transformative change. This depends on a collective commitment, a readiness to innovate, and a culture of shared leadership.
- Alignment of policies across a complex landscape is necessary to ensure that the Get Cumbria Working Plan, alongside other local initiatives, both supports and benefits from national funding, guidance, and performance frameworks.
- Securing sustained and adaptable funding is vital for maintaining and expanding interventions. Flexibility in funding allocation will enable the partnership to respond to evolving needs and priorities effectively.

The Get Cumbria Working Plan offers a bold, transformative approach to supporting economic growth and creating the conditions where everyone has the chance to thrive. It recognises that real progress requires more than isolated initiatives—it demands a unified, integrated system where every partner, every community, and every individual has a role to play. By embracing innovation, shared accountability, and a ‘no wrong door’ approach, Cumbria is poised to break down barriers to employment, address deep-rooted structural and systemic challenges, and create pathways to good jobs for all residents.

The plan requires commitment to long-term change, flexibility and sustained investment. It calls for new ways of working, deeper partnerships, and a keen focus on outcomes that will drive higher employment, reduced inactivity, and improved wellbeing for all communities in Cumbria.

**Together, let's get Cumbria Working.**



