Wokingham Borough Employment and Skills Strategy 2026 -2031 - Executive Summary

Wokingham Borough Employment and Skills Strategy 2026–2031 sets out a clear vision to create a fairer, more inclusive labour market, where all residents who want to work are supported to access good employment and develop the skills needed to thrive.

Despite being a high-performing borough with strong employment (79.9%) and above-average earnings, prosperity is not shared equally. Hidden inequalities persist, including gaps in attainment for disadvantaged young people, rising economic inactivity among young adults, and significant gender disparities in employment and pay. There are also over 3,000 economically inactive residents who want to work, representing untapped potential within the local labour market.

At the same time, employers face persistent skills shortages across key sectors including digital technology, life sciences, construction, creative industries, adult social care, and green industries. These challenges are compounded by cross-cutting gaps in employability skills such as communication, resilience, and management capability. The strategy takes a forward look to the potential needs, challenges and opportunities for growth, ensuring we prepare both business and residents to adapt.

The Employment and Skills Strategy provide us with a framework to bring together Wokingham Borough's strong economy, growing sectors, and strong partnerships, creating an opportunity to better connect residents with skills, training, and good jobs—particularly those currently facing barriers to work. By aligning employers, education providers, and public services through a more coordinated system, the borough can unlock untapped local talent, address skills shortages in key industries, attract funding, and ensure that more residents can benefit from economic growth while supporting business productivity and future workforce needs.

Priority groups and inclusive growth

The strategy targets those most at risk of being left behind:

- Young people, particularly those with additional needs, such as Care leavers, SEND or at risk of becoming NEET
- Women, especially those returning to work or balancing caring responsibilities
- Economically inactive residents who want to work, including carers, older workers, disabled people, and new migrant communities

By focusing on these groups, the strategy will unlock local talent, reduce inequality, and support long-term economic growth.

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Strategic priorities

Four strategic priorities underpin delivery

Work opportunities for all

Careers & learning opportunities for all

Supporting young peoples' ambitions

Skills for local business

A coordinated approach to delivery

The strategy responds by creating a joined-up, locally responsive employment and skills system, aligned with regional and national priorities including the Berkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan and Get Berkshire Working. Central to delivery is the ACCESS Hub, which will provide a coordinated, accessible gateway to employment support, training, and employer engagement, simplifying the system for residents and businesses alike.

The ACCESS HUB stands for:

A – Accessibility
C - Careers Education
C – Collaboration
E - Early Intervention
S - Support for Businesses
S - Skills for Future Economy

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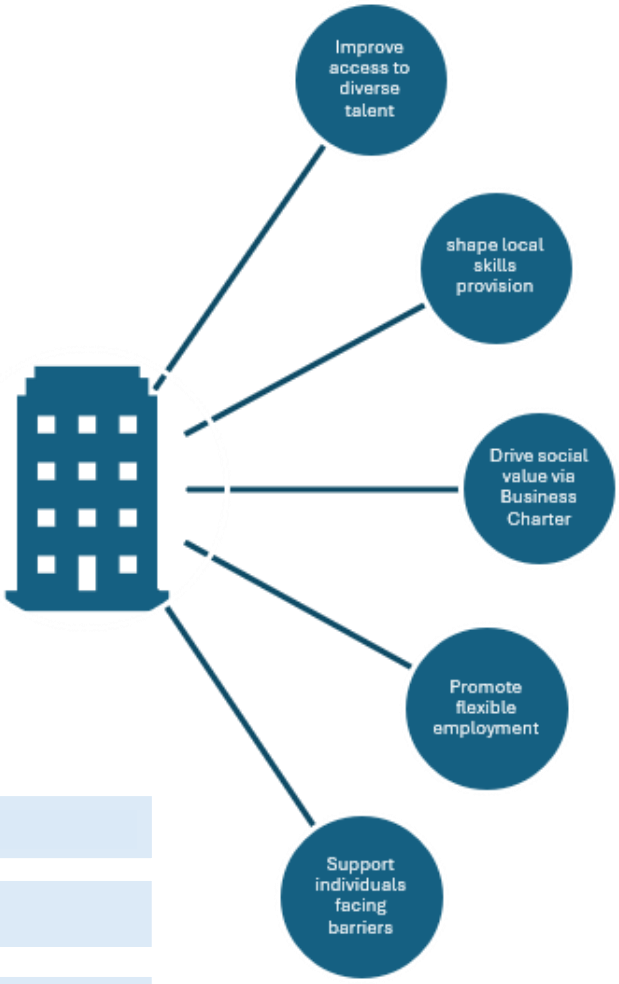
The role of business

Businesses are central to the success of this strategy. Through stronger partnerships, the Council will listen to and work with employers to provide them with the tools to support people into work.

Anchor institutions, including the Council and major employers, will lead by example—using their employment and spending power to create opportunities, support local supply chains, and drive inclusive growth.



Planning for the future

The strategy takes a forward-looking approach to economic change. It prepares the borough for:

The impact of **automation and AI** on jobs and skills requirements

Growth in green industries and the transition to net zero

Increasing demand in **health and social care** due to an ageing population

Workforce pressures arising from demographic change, including a declining working-age population

The need for **lifelong learning and reskilling** across all age groups

By aligning skills provision with future labour market demand and supporting residents to adapt, the borough will remain resilient, competitive, and inclusive.

Measuring success

Progress will be tracked through a robust performance framework with clear key performance indicators (KPIs), including:

- Number of individuals from priority groups supported into employment
- Number of apprenticeships, work placements, and employer-led training opportunities created
- Employer engagement levels, including participation in the Business Charter
- Number of businesses supported to recruit locally and inclusively
- Number of partnerships and projects developed through the ACCESS Hub

Performance will be reviewed quarterly, with annual evaluation to ensure the strategy remains responsive to changing economic conditions and emerging opportunities.

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