



Herefordshire
and Worcestershire

Health and Work – WorkWell

Meeting: Health and Wellbeing Board

Meeting date: Monday 18 May 2026

Report by: Judy Gibbs, Joint Programme Director: Health and Work -
NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care
Board

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards)

Purpose

To brief the Health and Wellbeing Board members on the progress of the Health and Work Strategy, Government direction, and the progress of WorkWell.

Recommendation(s)

The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to note the contents of this report and consider where the board can support the implementation and delivery of the Work and Health Herefordshire Operations Group.

Alternative options

No alternative options identified.

Key considerations

Introduction

1. In 2024, NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board (the ICB) was selected as one of 15 areas in the country to pilot the Government's WorkWell programme. Alongside setting up a new set of services to support people to overcome health-related barriers to employment, there was also the requirement to work with partners to create a Health and Work Strategy across the two counties.
2. The strategy brings together the work of the ICB, Local Authority Public Health and Economic Development teams across the ICB area, local Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and other partners such as the Chamber of Commerce and VCSE.

3. The Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Work Strategy 2025–2030 was approved in Autumn 2025 and sets out a system wide approach to improving employment outcomes by recognising the strong, two way relationship between health and work.
4. While overall employment rates in both counties are high, a significant proportion of residents are economically inactive due to long term health conditions or disability. The strategy responds to this challenge by aligning health, employment, skills, and business support partners around a shared ambition to create inclusive, healthy and productive workplaces, reduce avoidable sickness absence and improve access to good work for people who can and want to work.
5. The strategy is structured around four strategic ambitions:
 - a. Creating inclusive and healthy work environments
 - b. Providing clear pathways and support into employment
 - c. Intervening early to prevent people leaving work due to ill health
 - d. Strengthening collaboration across local stakeholders.
6. Delivery is rooted in a place based, prevention led approach that simplifies access to support through a ‘no wrong door’ philosophy and makes better use of NHS, local authority, DWP, voluntary sector and employer capabilities. Success will be measured through improved employment and disability employment rates, reduced health related inactivity and sickness absence, increased numbers of disability confident employers and stronger system coordination that embeds health and work as a core driver of long term economic and wellbeing outcomes.

Links to Wider Government Strategies

Get Britain Working

7. **Get Britain Working** is HM Government’s flagship labour market reform programme, set out in the Get Britain Working White Paper (published November 2024), with the core aim of raising the employment rate to 80 percent and reversing the sharp rise in economic inactivity driven largely by long term sickness and disability. The White Paper makes clear that improving health and reducing avoidable sickness absence are now central to economic growth, not a separate policy area. Key reforms include integration of Jobcentres and careers support, a stronger focus on early intervention and prevention to stop people falling out of work due to ill health, expansion of evidence-based programmes and greater local leadership to join up health, skills and employment systems around place-based need. Government expects local systems to align activity, simplify access for individuals and employers and shift from welfare administration towards sustained progression into good work.

Keep Britain Working

8. **Keep Britain Working** is an independent, employer led review commissioned by HM Government to address the rapid rise in economic inactivity caused by ill health and disability, with the aim of keeping more people in work and supporting faster, sustainable returns to work. The review concludes that ill health has become one of the biggest drags on productivity and growth, and that the current system relies too heavily on individuals and the NHS while offering fragmented and inconsistent support to employers. It calls for a fundamental shift to a shared responsibility model, where employers lead on prevention and early intervention, supported by clearer standards such as a healthy working lifecycle, better access to workplace health and occupational health provision, and stronger coordination between employment, health services and government. The core ambition is to reduce avoidable job loss, narrow the disability employment gap and embed healthier, more inclusive workplaces as business as usual, delivering benefits for individuals, employers and the wider economy.

9. The Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Work Strategy 2025–2030 provides the local delivery framework for the national ambitions set out in Get Britain Working and Keep Britain Working, translating system level reform into practical, place based action. All three share a clear diagnosis: economic inactivity is being driven increasingly by ill health and disability, and traditional, fragmented approaches are no longer sufficient. Where Get Britain Working focuses on reforming employment support, joining up health, skills and work systems and increasing local leadership, the local strategy responds directly by committing partners across the NHS, local authorities including public health, economic development and skills and employment teams, the local Department for Work and Pensions and other partners including the voluntary sector and employability sector to work as a single system, simplify pathways and adopt a ‘no wrong door’ approach for residents and employers alike.
10. Keep Britain Working reinforces this direction by highlighting the need to prevent avoidable job loss through early intervention, healthier workplaces and stronger employer capability. The Herefordshire and Worcestershire strategy mirrors this expectation by prioritising inclusive workplaces, reduced sickness absence and better retention, embedding support through the WorkWell programme and providing clearer routes back into work for those with health conditions who can and want to work. In doing so, the strategy positions the area to meet HM Government’s expectations that local systems will move beyond short term programmes, support employers to take a more active role in prevention and retention and embed health and work as a shared responsibility that underpins productivity, economic growth and population wellbeing over the long term.

What does this look like in Herefordshire?

11. The Health and Work Operations Board in Herefordshire has made strong and tangible progress in a relatively short period, particularly in building the foundations needed for effective system delivery. A major early success has been the creation of a genuinely multi partner operational group, bringing together Herefordshire Council, Public Health, NHS partners, DWP, the Growth Hub and others into a single forum focused on delivery rather than discussion. This has enabled shared ownership of the Health and Work agenda, clearer accountability and a much stronger alignment between health, employment and economic development activity. The Board has also helped elevate health and work as a recognised priority beyond county boundaries, with the development and sign off of the “Get the Marches Working” approach with Shropshire Council, embedding health and work as a strategic regional concern.
12. Alongside this system building work, the Board’s members have seen a number of practical delivery successes that are already benefiting residents and employers. These include the launch of Connect to Work by Herefordshire Council, providing direct support to residents with health related barriers to employment, and the conversations to align Connect to Work and the ICB WorkWell programme within the Youth Hub, improving coherence and accessibility for young people. The introduction of a Fit Note pilot in 1 Herefordshire primary care network (PCN) is a further positive step, testing more effective conversations about work and health at an earlier stage. On the employer side, progress has been made through the Growth Hub developing a dedicated Health and Work presence on its website, and through Herefordshire Council establishing a Cornerstone Network to support the development of more inclusive programmes and employment practices. Collectively, these achievements demonstrate a clear shift from strategy to action, with the Operations Board playing a critical role in turning national and ICS ambitions into meaningful local delivery.

Collaboration around Events to increase awareness – the programme to date

13. Collaboration around events has been a clear strength of the Health and Work activity in Herefordshire and Worcestershire, helping to move the strategy from intent into visible, practical action. Partners across the two counties have worked together to co design and co deliver events, ensuring that messaging is consistent and audiences are not duplicated or confused.

This collaborative approach has enabled health, employment and business perspectives to sit alongside each other, reinforcing the shared responsibility for keeping people well and in work.

14. The events delivered to date have been well received and have started to build momentum. They have provided a valuable platform for employers, practitioners and frontline staff to engage in open conversations about health, work, reasonable adjustments and early intervention, while also showcasing available local support. Importantly, these events have helped to test messaging, strengthen relationships between partners and identify gaps or opportunities for future activity. Collectively, they demonstrate growing confidence in joint delivery and provide a solid foundation for a more coordinated programme of Health and Work engagement events going forward.
15. Events held to date include:
 - a. Introducing the Health and Work Strategy – March 2025, 40 attendees, held in Herefordshire Cyber Centre
 - b. Harnessing your neurodiverse talent – September 2025 , 65 attendees, held at the Abbey Hotel, Great Malvern
 - c. Leading with Mental Health in Mind - January 2026 , 80 attendees, held at the Abbey Hotel, Great Malvern
16. Planned Events include:
 - a. Leading for Wellness – Supporting Musculoskeletal Health – May 2026, currently have around 45 attendees booked on, held at the Abbey Hotel, Great Malvern
 - b. Having the Conversations That Matter: Health and Wellbeing at Work – October 2026, held at the Abbey Hotel, Great Malvern

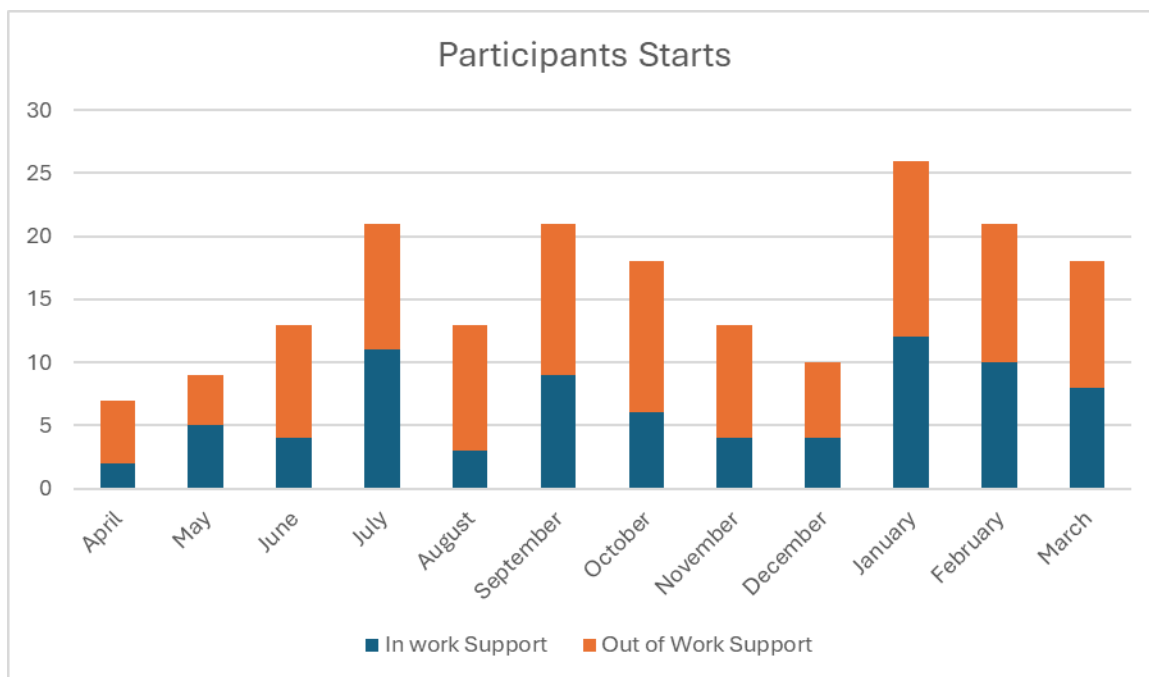
Keep Herefordshire and Worcestershire Working Conference

17. On 8 July, the partnership will deliver an employer facing conference designed to prompt early consideration of how organisations are likely to be impacted by the Government’s Keep Britain Working agenda and forthcoming changes to legislation. The event is intended to help employers get ahead of emerging expectations rather than respond reactively.
18. The conference has been shaped as a practical, employer focused response to the growing challenges of workforce health, retention and productivity across Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Its purpose is to help employers understand why health and work is now a critical business issue, connect the national Keep Britain Working direction to local labour market realities and showcase the range of support already available across the two counties. By bringing together the NHS, Growth Hubs, the Chamber of Commerce and specialist partners, the event creates a single, coherent space for employers to engage with health and work as a core productivity and resilience issue, not a standalone wellbeing topic.
19. For employers, the conference offers clear and tangible value. Attendees will gain insight into national policy direction, practical tools to reduce avoidable sickness absence and real world approaches to retaining skilled staff and supporting employees with health conditions. Through expert speakers, workshops and peer exchange, employers will leave with a stronger understanding of the healthy working lifecycle, early intervention, reasonable adjustments and how to access local support such as WorkWell and public health initiatives. The event is designed to equip employers with knowledge, connections and actionable steps they can take back into their organisations to build healthier, more resilient and more productive workplaces.

WorkWell – The latest Performance

20. WorkWell is a locally delivered, early intervention employment and health support programme designed to help people stay in, or return to, work when health issues begin to create barriers. It supports both employed residents who are at risk of falling out of work due to ill health and unemployed people with health related challenges who want support to move into employment. In Herefordshire, WorkWell is well established as a core component of the Health and Work Strategy, with robust system alignment across the NHS, local authority, DWP and the Growth Hub.
21. Delivered countywide by Taurus Healthcare, the programme provides personalised, flexible support by coordinating access to health advice, employment support and practical workplace solutions, and works closely with employers to enable early intervention and reasonable adjustments. Operating on a 'no wrong door' basis, WorkWell simplifies access for residents and employers, reduces fragmentation and supports improved engagement, with early indications showing it is successfully reaching both employed and unemployed residents who need health related employment support.
22. From an individual's perspective, WorkWell offers personalised health and work coaching tailored to their specific needs and circumstances. Individuals are supported through a series of one to one coaching sessions, typically between six and twelve, during which they work with a dedicated Health and Work Coach to develop and agree a practical action plan. This plan focuses on improving health, confidence and work readiness, supporting people to remain in work or return to employment where possible. Coaches provide ongoing encouragement and guidance throughout the journey, adapting support as needs change. Individuals are supported to progress at their own pace, with planned discharge when appropriate or onward referral to additional health, employment or community services where further support would be beneficial.
23. Programme performance continues to show positive trajectory, with steady growth in engagement and delivery:
 - From 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2026 the programme has seen 220 participants.
 - This is currently averaging 21 participants per month.
 - Peak delivery reached 26 starts in January 2026.
 - Approximately 58% of participants are out of work at the point of referral, highlighting that we need to work closer with individual issuing Fit Notes and employers.
 - Primary care remains the main referral route (~55–75%), demonstrating strong PCN engagement.
 - Conversion rates have improved, reaching ~70% in recent months.
 - Around 16% of participants remain in or return to work following support.
 - Approximately 13% secure new employment.
 - Around 5% of participants have completed plan but been referred onwards for further employment or health support.

For Herefordshire, WorkWell is delivered through Taurus Healthcare and monthly participant starts are as follows:



24. This reflects the programme's dual focus on both job retention and re-entry to the labour market.
25. In 2025, the WorkWell programme secured additional funding to deliver a Fit Note pilot in Herefordshire, aimed at shifting conversations away from sickness absence and towards health, capacity and returning to work. The pilot supports earlier and more constructive discussions between clinicians and residents, with clearer routes into the WorkWell programme to help reduce repeated fit note issuance. It also promotes more joined up conversations with employers about what work may be possible with the right support or reasonable adjustments, rather than defaulting to time away from work. This approach aligns strongly with the Health and Work Strategy and national Keep Britain Working expectations around prevention and retention. While full outcome data is not yet available, the pilot has been positively received by partners and is already strengthening links between primary care, employment support and workplace health.
26. Overall, both WorkWell and the Fit Note pilot are contributing to a growing shift in Herefordshire towards earlier intervention, better coordination and a shared responsibility for keeping people well and working. As monitoring and reporting mature, the inclusion of employment status breakdowns and outcome data will further strengthen the evidence base and support decisions on future scaling and integration.

Environmental impact

27. No specific environmental impacts.

Equality duty

28. Delivery of the Health and Work strategy will be governed by the NHS Equality Duties, and these will be factored into delivery plans and the various Impact Assessments that will be undertaken relating to any decisions that would be made under the remit of the plan.

Resource implications

29. There are no direct financial implications for the Health and Wellbeing Board at this stage. However, capacity and resource remain a challenge in Herefordshire in terms of fully embedding and scaling this programme of work. Consideration could be given, at a future Board meeting, to whether additional resource should be made available to strengthen support for employers in creating more inclusive and healthy workplaces. Increased capacity in this area would help

create the conditions for residents to sustain and progress in work, support earlier intervention and prevention and contribute to improved employment outcomes. Over time, this would also support wider system priorities, including reducing health related economic inactivity and addressing health inequalities across the county.

Legal implications

30. No specific legal implications.

Risk management

31. There are no specific risks to highlight in relation to this briefing paper.

Consultees

32. Not applicable to this briefing paper.

Appendices

No appendices

Background papers

There are no background papers, as per the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, but links are provided below to published works.

A full copy of the Health and Work Strategy can be accessed here:

[Health and Work Strategy](#)

A full copy of Get Britain Working can be accessed here :

[Get Britain Working White Paper - GOV.UK](#)

A full copy of Keep Britain Working can be found here :

[Keep Britain Working: Final report - GOV.UK](#)