



Cheshire and
Merseyside

Health and Care Partnership



SOCIAL
FINANCE

PPL

Cheshire and Merseyside System/service mapping



System mapping: Aims & Objectives

Aims:

Building on the data analysis undertaken as part of this work, the system/service mapping exercise aimed to build a picture of existing health and work arrangements across the nine Places within Cheshire and Merseyside.

The mapping exercise is important because it contributes to a clear understanding of how health and work-related services are structured across Cheshire and Merseyside. By showing existing arrangements, it provides insight into how local and regional priorities align, identifies gaps or overlaps in services, and points to opportunities for better collaboration. This perspective supports strategic decision-making by helping stakeholders focus on interventions and integration of services.

Objectives:

Mapping existing arrangements

Review current work and health initiatives across the nine Places within Cheshire & Merseyside to assess how they align with ICS priorities and the goals of the Health and Care Partnership, including mapping governance structures, stakeholder collaboration, and active programmes and services to support those with health-related barriers to work.

Gap analysis

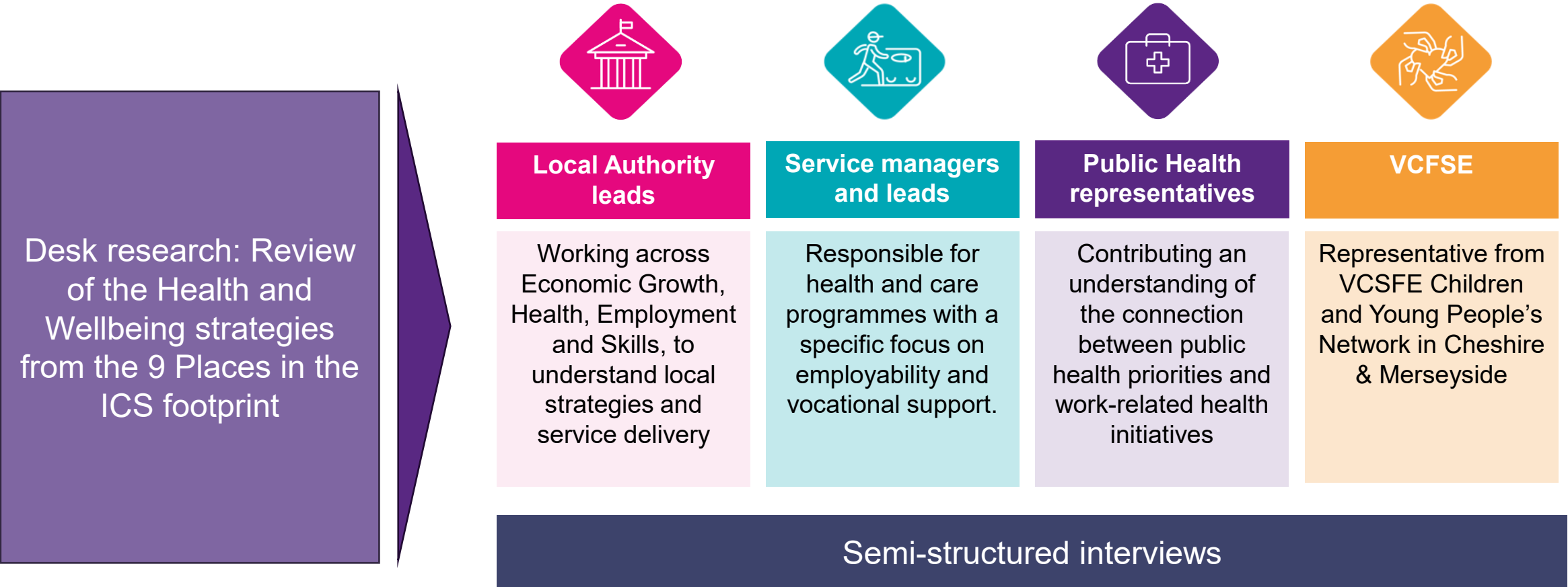
Identify gaps in service delivery, unmet needs and barriers to system integration, highlighting areas where health and employment services are lacking, with a particular focus on underserved communities or populations facing systematic inequalities. Build an understanding of where tailored interventions can be implemented to bridge service gaps.

Opportunities for collaboration and good practice sharing

Explore opportunities for integration and the sharing of good practice, highlighting successful models that align with the HCP principles of focusing on prevention and equity, anti-poverty work, and social justice. This work identifies programmes and initiatives that have the potential to be scaled or adapted across the nine Places and highlights successful models (e.g. early intervention programmes).

Methodology

We conducted the mapping through an initial in-depth literature review, complemented by semi-structured interviews with 27 stakeholders ranging across the Health and Work landscape. A particular focus on employment and skills teams and their understanding of their role in health and where they feel gaps in service provision lie.



Strategic approaches to health, work and economic development vary across the 9 Places

Each of the 9 Places within the ICS footprint is required to have a Health and Wellbeing Board. The job of each board is to improve the health and wellbeing of the local population, as a partnership committee, producing a joint assessment of health needs and a joint health and wellbeing strategy.

A review of each of the 9 Places' Health and Wellbeing strategies indicates alignment in prioritising employment as a key social determinant of health and wellbeing across the region. Despite this, there is some variation in how prominently employment features in local strategies as a social determinant to health, and to what extent it is linked to concrete health-based impact measurements so that progress can be tracked.

The service mapping exercise indicates that the availability and range of employment and skills programmes focused on supporting those with health-related barriers maps broadly onto the prioritisation of employment and skills as social determinants of health observable within the health and wellbeing strategy documents themselves. Despite local differences in population demographics and economic factors, several cohorts facing health-related barriers to work were repeatedly highlighted in interviews as those in need of extra support to sustain or enter the workforce.



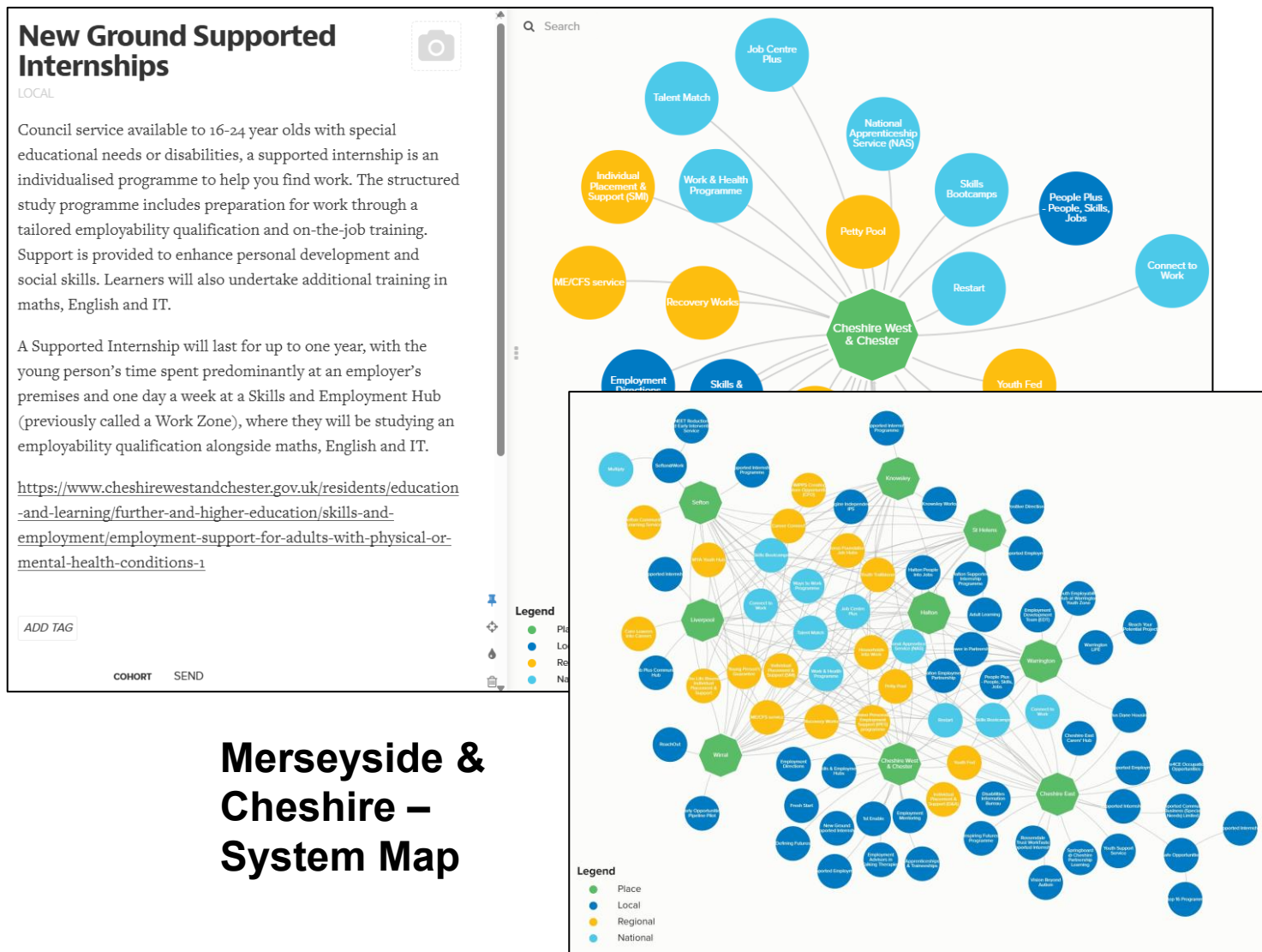
Creation of service map

Service mapping output is captured in [an interactive tool](#) that displays the health-related employment and skills programmes and initiatives from the perspectives of those involved in service delivery.

The tool provides a visual representation, information, and links to pages of the constellation of employment services and programmes across the region. In doing so, it provides a view of employment services and programmes commissioned at the local, regional and national levels, as well as the sectors taking a lead role in service delivery for each service.

The tool complements our data analysis, allowing for a broad view of service availability against the work and health needs of the population.

Chester West & Chester – Work & health services & programmes





Strategy, Governance and Objectives

- **Strategy:** Halton's Health and Wellbeing Strategy delivered by One Halton Place Based Partnership (PBP). This consists of partners from the LA, NHS, GPs, VCFSE, Health Providers and Hospital Trusts that work across Halton.
- **Commitments:** Commitments around the adoption of a **healthy workplace standards charter**, provision of guidance to workplaces to recruit and retain people with a disability or long-term condition, and pledge to offer reskilling or new skills training and support to older unemployed adults, at higher risk of facing health-related barriers to work.
- **Partnership:** For 8 years, Halton Council has led the Halton Employment Partnership (HEP): a platform for collaboration to jointly address borough-wide employment challenges (incl. DWP, housing associations, colleges and training providers, LCRCA, Chamber of Commerce members).

Mapping interview insights

- **Employment support:** Halton People Into Jobs, funded through UK Shared Prosperity Fund and LCRCA offers a range of programmes to support residents to overcome barriers to work, such as debt/money advice, health improvement, training, and skills for life. The service provides a **bespoke job matching service** for individuals looking for work and employers seeking new employees, working to match residents to a range of opportunities to help them move closer to work.
- **Health challenges:** Council employment services note a significant **rise in mental health issues** among job seekers post-Covid, leading to increased isolation and reluctance to return to work. Many individuals report feeling overwhelmed by the prospect of re-entering the workforce, while others lack motivation to do so due to lack of incentive to get off benefits. Engaging with this group is an ongoing challenge for existing programmes, with follow up mechanisms between health and employment services lacking, meaning that people tend to fall off the radar.
- **Other left-behind groups:** Gap in tailored support for people with experience of the **criminal justice system** and **care leavers**, who face unique challenges in securing employment. These groups require specialised programs to address their specific needs and barriers, which are often related to physical and mental health. Historic attempts to engage care leavers in bespoke employability schemes have encountered low levels of engagement with the target group.
- **Skills:** Job vacancies are not being filled due to **skills mismatches** to suit local positions. Many individuals lack necessary skills or motivation to apply for available positions, contributing to ongoing economic inactivity.



Health & Wellbeing Strategy & Governance

- **Strategy:** Knowsley Health & Wellbeing Board delivers a Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy in line with the Knowsley Better Together. The Board comprises partners from the Council NHS England, local NHS provider organisations, Healthwatch Knowsley, community organisations, and the Chairs of the Knowsley Safeguarding Adults Board and Safeguarding Children's Board.
- **Commitments:** Two key priorities set out in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy are: (1) **Reducing health inequalities** and (2) **Mental Health, Wellbeing and Social Isolation**. The link between unemployment and health and wellbeing is recognised as a key social determinant of health, with the strategy pledging to hold the local health and wellbeing system to account through the application of the evidence-based Marmot objectives, which include fair employment and good work. However, the strategy itself does not go into detail on how the conditions for better work can be brought about in the local context.

Mapping interview insights

- **Employment support:** Knowsley Works is the Council's employment support service, run by its Employment and Skills team. It offers job search support, training, coaching, and CV help. Funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Council resources, it places a strong focus on its **apprenticeship programme**, which has a placement retention rate of over 90%. It targets 16–18-year-olds in local growth sectors like construction. The scheme reserves 10 places annually for looked-after children and 10 for people with health-related employment barriers.
- **Health challenges:** There are major service gaps for high-need groups, including **care leavers, NEETs, young people with justice involvement, and those with mental health conditions**. The issue is often not a lack of services but the challenge of reaching people who are socially isolated, distrustful of authority, and disenfranchised.
- **Integration with health:** Knowsley Works has limited contact with health partners—none with hospitals and inconsistent GP referrals. **Social prescribing**, where it has occurred, has been successful. The service is eager to build stronger links with health services.
- **Funding and system frustrations:** There is frustration over the need to pursue short-term contracts from multiple funders. This creates a fragmented service landscape with gaps caused by rigid eligibility criteria. There is a strong push for more **integrated, flexible funding** that enables a universal service model and 'no wrong door' approach.

Liverpool



Health & Wellbeing Strategy & Governance

- **Strategy:** The One Liverpool Strategy is a joint strategy delivered by the Liverpool Health & Care Partnership. This Partnership consists of Liverpool City Council, NHS foundation trusts, Primary Care networks, health partners in research and innovation, and the VSFSE sector. The One Strategy is due for a refresh in 2025, with work on this ongoing.
- **Commitments:** The One Liverpool Strategy frames several pledges employment-related 'Critical Actions' intended to reduce health inequalities by supporting people to find and sustain work. Among these actions are: (1) Providing greater access to paid employment, **including apprenticeships and initiatives that target residents who are unemployed, economically inactive or in low paid, insecure work**; (2) Actively **promoting workplace wellbeing** through a range of evidence-based initiatives, delivered at scale and consistently; and (3) Developing **effective pathways into adulthood for children with special educational needs** and disability, including supported internships and employability for local young people.

Mapping interview insights

- **Employment support:** The Liverpool In Work service is the Liverpool City Council's service to support those who are unemployed, over 16 and live in Liverpool with **apprenticeships, training opportunities, job clubs and one-to-one support**. The Ways to Work Programme is funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund with Liverpool City Region Combined Authority as the lead authority.
- **Target cohorts:** Liverpool In Work focuses on supporting several core cohorts with barriers to work: care leavers, ethnic minorities, people with experience of the criminal justice system, veterans, and refugees and asylum seekers. Although the service is not integrated with health, it is increasingly recognised that **these groups overlap and often have co-occurring mental and physical health needs** that impact on their ability to work.
- **Gaps in provision:** Long-term unemployed people are falling through the gaps due to focus on economic inactivity. UK Shared Prosperity Fund funding is earmarked for initiatives to support economically inactive people. Even though the long-term unemployed are experiencing the same barriers as economically inactive people, the Liverpool In Work service feels **restricted in the support they can offer long-term unemployed**.
- **Employer support needs:** The service recognises that **extra support for employers** to hire those with complex barriers to work should be explored. Funding for the Young Person's Guarantee is used as a limited incentive for businesses, with up to £3k for each 30hr role to fill priority groups. The roles target young people aged 18–24, and the initiative has been quite successful in supporting care leavers into work, but more funding to break down barriers with employers is needed.



Health & Wellbeing Strategy

- **Strategy:** Sefton Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2025 is delivered in equal partnership by the Sefton Health and Wellbeing Board. Members of the Board include NHS partners, Sefton Council for Voluntary Service, Healthwatch and Sefton Council.
- **Commitments:** The Health and Wellbeing Strategy sets out several objectives that address employment as a social determinant of health, with commitments to address challenges from **poor quality or uncertain employment, debt, caring for children and/or older relatives and physical health problems** as drivers of poor mental wellbeing and mental health conditions. It also pledges to treat employment, adult learning and training opportunities, workplaces and person-centred support for carers as key concerns, while also supporting people with mental illness to overcome barriers to employment and training.

Mapping interview insights

- **Employment support:** Sefton@Work is the Sefton Council's in-house employment brokerage service, **sitting within the Council's Economic Regeneration Team**. The Council's employment and skills team has a strategic objective of moving employment and skills work closer to health provisions, as well as a long-term strategy for engaging NEET young people. Sefton@Work works closely with Sefton Community Learning service, in which many of the courses include health and wellbeing components to skills offerings.
- **Health challenges:** 30-35% of people presenting at Sefton@Work describe having health-related barriers to work, ranging from long-term disabilities to short-term health conditions. This level has remained consistent over many years. Lots of this number have health-related challenges to work that they have not been able to gain adequate treatment for. Others who have conditions themselves do not recognise as warranting treatment, such **as low-level physical and mental health conditions**.
- **Strategic cohesion and gaps:** A lack of strategic cohesion exists among the employment and skills programmes commissioned at the regional and national levels, which often sees them overlapping in terms of target cohorts, with **strict eligibility criteria excluding people who are already participating in other programmes**, which contributes to a confusing local offer. There are currently several programmes for people with health-related barriers to work but a funding gap for support for those who have not got a health condition, but for whom unemployment could lead to the development of health issues in the future.
- **Embedding social value:** Sefton@Work's situation within the Economic Regeneration Team has led to a novel approach to how **social value in employment is embedded in planning in Sefton**, New retail buildings and licences are often tied to a social commitment to support people with health conditions into work and the creation of roles for which Sefton@Work clients have first refusal.

St Helens



Health & Wellbeing Strategy & Governance

- **Strategy:** The St Helens People's Board carries out the statutory functions of the health and wellbeing board in St Helens. It oversees a locally-driven, whole-community integrated care model called 'St Helens Cares', consisting of NHS partners, St Helens Council, Halton & St Helens VCA, police and fire. The strategic approach to improving the health and wellbeing outcomes of residents of St Helens is laid out in the St Helens People's Plan 2021-2026.
- **Commitments:** The People's Plan recognises the link poor health, inter-generational unemployment, and low levels of enterprise and aspiration, with employment seen as contributing to 10 per cent of health outcomes. The People's Plan includes a key outcome of **improving the proportion of adults with learning disabilities in employment by 20 per cent by 2026**. St Helens People's Plan also commits to maintaining a healthy health and care workforce by prioritising wellbeing through supportive leadership, mental health resources and flexible working, emphasising creating a compassionate, inclusive environment where staff feel valued, listened to, and equipped to manage stress and change.

Mapping interview insights

- **Employment support:** St Helens' largest employment support programme is the Ways to Work programme, delivered by the Council in collaboration with local partners such as Career Connect and Jobcentre Plus. It is designed to support individuals aged 16 and over who are out of work or education and facing barriers to employment. It offers tailored one-to-one support from key workers and employment coaches, including mentoring, training, paid work experience, job search help, CV writing, and interview preparation. Funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the service has registered and worked with **over 3,000 residents since its inception in 2016**, helping over 1,200 people into employment, training and education.
- **Supported employment:** The Council's in-house Supported Employment service helps **adults (18+) with learning disabilities and/or autism spectrum disorders** move into paid work. It offers tailored, one-to-one support—from pre-employment training and CV/interview help to work placements, job coaching, and in-work support—working closely to carve supportive job opportunities with local employers to help residents with extra needs build workplace confidence and skills.
- **Health and work challenges:** St Helens has the **highest rate of long-term sick** out of the 9 Places in the Cheshire and Merseyside area, increasing from 7.3% in Dec 2014 to 10.3% in Dec 2024.
- **Skills and attainment:** Low attainment and skills are a continuing challenge across St Helens, with **Level 3 education attainment and adult skills levels lower than national averages**. In The St Helens Borough Strategy 2021-2030, the Council has pledged to work with schools to support those in the greatest need to catch up with educational achievement.



Health & Wellbeing Strategy & Governance

- **Strategy:** Wirral Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2027 is overseen by the Wirral Health and Wellbeing Board – a collective of local organisations including the Council, NHS, Healthwatch, Wirral CVS, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority, Merseyside Police, the Department for Work and Pensions and Wirral Metropolitan College.
- **Commitments and partnership:** Wirral Council maintains a **close partnership with Public Health** that features a shared understanding of employment as a key social determinant of health. This is evidenced in the centrality of work in Wirral Health and Wellbeing strategy, and strategic objectives around using economic growth to support the work and health of residents. Wirral's strategic approach is heavily focused on supporting and partnering with local organisations and leveraging local assets to promote inclusive economic participation, while embedding health considerations into development initiatives to benefit residents.

Mapping interview insights

- **Employment support:** Wirral Council is unique across Merseyside and Cheshire as it does not have an in-house employment service, instead contracting a **consortium of VCS organisations working under the name of Involve Northwest**, who partner with Wirral Change to deliver community-based employment and skills provision. Involve Northwest operates from three hubs around the borough and has held the contract for employment support services for over a decade. They are invaluable partners due to their standing and embeddedness within local communities and ability to reach those further from the employment market.
- **Community asset-based approach:** Wirral's community asset-based approach is exemplified by the Early Opportunities Pipeline pilot, which is led by the Council's Head of Economic Growth and Public Health in collaboration with the Council commissioned employment support service Reach Out that is delivered by Involve Northwest. The pilot is testing a **new approach to recruitment processes within Anchor organisations** that facilitates employment for residents by removing recruitment barriers for those furthest from the job market. In doing so, it aims to embed an equitable ethos and create a culture change within the NHS and Council – two of Wirral's largest employers – towards a practice of recruiting on attitude rather than experience.
- **Funding gaps and challenges:** A gap currently exists in statutory funding to support worklessness, forcing Wirral to follow a reactive approach to bidding in for limited programme-specific funding for employment programmes with **narrow eligibility criteria that can exclude those with more complex needs**. There is a pressing need for more flexible funding that allows us to target known at-risk groups in a way that funding from sources such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund does not. The net result of a disparate funding system is service gaps that mean that people miss out on the health benefits of employment and result in a higher ultimate burden on public health teams, who are left to deal with the gaps and unmet needs.

Cheshire West & Chester



Health & Wellbeing Strategy & Governance

- **Strategy:** Cheshire West and Chester Council's Joint Health and Care Strategy is also its Place Plan. It is unique among the other Places for this reason. Cheshire West and Chester is the lead authority presiding over the implementation of the Get Britain Working Programme in Cheshire and Warrington.
- **Commitments:** Cheshire West and Chester's Place Plan promotes a targeted integration of work and health by aligning economic development with health goals through the Inclusive Economy Strategy. It supports individuals facing employment barriers—such as **mental illness, long-term conditions, or substance use**—via dedicated local programmes. The Plan encourages healthier workplaces by partnering with employers to promote wellbeing and inclusivity, including age-, carer-, and disability-friendly practices. It also advocates for businesses to address health inequalities through improved governance, inclusive recruitment, and participation in a regional Fair Employment Charter.

Mapping interview insights

- **Employment support:** Cheshire West and Chester Council has a strong in-house suite of services for employment and skills, delivered by its Skills and Employment Team. The team focuses strategically on supporting underserved populations, including individuals with disabilities, those over 50, and residents in rural areas. The overarching goal is to provide inclusive employment and skills support for residents at various life stages, ensuring everyone has access to the resources they need to succeed. Cheshire West and Chester has a **strong focus on evidence-based models of supported employment**, such as those following the SEQF and IPS frameworks.
- **Approach to VCFSE partnerships:** Cheshire West and Chester adopts a cautious approach to contracting VCFSE organisations, **prioritising providers with proven expertise in employment support** over those with established specialisms in working with groups with health-related barriers to work. While they maintain strong mutual referral pathways with VCFSE organisation, a strategic decision to maintain employment and skills support services in-house at the Council due to their record of ensuring high-quality employment outcomes. They value reciprocal partnerships with VCFSEs to deliver integrated, holistic employment support.
- **Support for young people:** The Skills and Employment Team has identified a **significant gap in support for young people transitioning from education to work or Further Education**. In response to this, it offers the Fresh Start programme to support young people at risk of NEET. Although it does not follow the IPS fidelity framework, the service is considered to be similar to IPS in the personalised employment support that it provides. However, there are concerns about the potential loss of funding for programmes like Fresh Start and essential skills training, which are crucial for supporting young people.
- **IPS innovations:** Cheshire West and Chester is a pioneer of a recent successful IPS application IPS pilot in Primary Care.

Cheshire East



Health & Wellbeing Strategy & Governance

- **Strategy:** The Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy for the population of Cheshire East 2023 – 2028 is written on behalf of Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Board and the Cheshire East Health and Care Partnership. The Health and Wellbeing Board is jointly led at CEO-level by Healthwatch Cheshire and CVS Cheshire East, with other members including NHS and Council partners, and housing, police and fire service representatives.
- **Commitments:** The Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy joint outcomes framework recognises employment and sufficient income as building blocks of good mental and physical health and wellbeing. It details plans to measure progress on its commitments in these areas across indicators, such as an **increase in the percentage of people aged 16–64 in good employment, and low NEET figures**.
- **Partnership:** Cheshire East Council hosts the **Welfare to Work Partnership**, which meets quarterly and aims to bring together all the services that contribute to supporting disadvantaged people into employment in the area to achieve several key objectives.

Mapping interview insights

- **Employment support:** Through its Welfare to Work Partnership, Cheshire East Council aims to eliminate service/geographical gaps and overlap, foster a joined-up approach to employer engagement, maintain a directory of all supported employment services, and create a joined-up approach to transition support and external funding. This partnership supports a strategic approach to make the **best use of and support existing community-based assets and organisations** to provide employment support services for those with health-related barriers to work.
- **Supporting people with complex needs:** Cheshire East Council has an **in-house Supported Employment team that works with disabled people with more complex needs** who want to enter paid employment. The service works to understand people's goals, match them with suitable work opportunities, and provide ongoing support to develop skills for those who need long-term ongoing support. The service is part of Cheshire East's commitment to increasing social inclusion for those with learning disabilities, which also includes an in-house Supported Internship programme in partnership with local employers and education providers.
- **Focus on deprivation:** Cheshire East's Council's Head of External Funding, Complex Worklessness & Inclusion highlighted **persistent challenges around reaching people in areas marked by high levels of deprivation** with employment support. Rigorous assessments of past investments based on data analysis in these areas are essential to determine whether they have led to meaningful improvements in individual outcomes.
- **Service gaps:** Significant gaps exist in specialist services to support **young people with mental health issues** to enter employment. This is also a recognised lack of specialised services for carers, more tailored support options are needed to address their unique challenges related to long-term economic inactivity.

Warrington



Health & Wellbeing Strategy & Governance

- **Strategy:** Warrington Council's public health and the Warrington Health and Wellbeing Board have collaborated to develop the borough's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, entitled 'Living Well in Warrington'. The board represents a range of organisations from across Warrington, including the NHS, GP practices, community and voluntary organisations, schools and the police.
- **Commitments:** The Living Well in Warrington Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2028 incorporates eight priorities recommended by the All Together Fairer report, including that which is focused on creating fair employment and good work for all. Warrington aims to achieve this by **reducing economic and health inequalities** by creating more and better-quality jobs, developing training and inclusive employment opportunities, embedding opportunities for social mobility and tackling debt. It sets out plans to address unemployment and health-related worklessness, which is more prevalent in Warrington's most deprived areas.

Mapping interview insights

- **Employment support:** Warrington Borough Council's LiFE (Learning, Information, Futures, Employment) career service offers tailored advice and guidance to help residents make **informed career choices**. It supports individuals with CV writing, job searching, interview preparation, and access to training or education. Meanwhile, Warrington Council's Employment Development Team (EDT) runs an employment support service that works closely with residents, local employers and training providers to connect jobseekers with opportunities across Warrington.
- **Place-based skills strategy:** Warrington has a place-based focus to its skills strategy, embodied by its **Warrington Employment Skills Action Group (WESAC)**, which is made up of employment services and training providers, health sector organisations, and community groups. The group aims to map existing provisions and identify gaps in services available to Warrington residents, playing a role in aligning strategies with local needs and fostering collaboration for skills development to address complex, overlapping challenges to employment that residents can face.
- **Funding challenges:** Unstable funding streams prevail across the system, especially for youth and SEND support, **limiting the scalability and sustainability of vital employment programmes**. This has led to gaps in provision, particularly around supported internships and employer engagement for complex cohorts.
- **Gaps in health integration:** A more integrated approach to addressing the link between health and employment is needed that includes health partners shouldering more responsibility for outcomes. Warrington feels like this **responsibility is being shouldered disproportionately by the local authorities and local employers**, who are already stretched due to the economic climate. More should be done to support employers to take people on – the previous DWP-funded Kickstart Scheme was an example of the type of support employers need to support those with complex barriers to work in that it served to lessen financial risk.