Appendix 4

Get Sussex Working | Stakeholder Engagement

Brighton & Hove City Council

1. Introduction

1.1   Purpose

This report informs the development of the Get Sussex Working Plan (GSWP) and the GSWP Implementation Plan which includes pan Sussex and local actions. GSWP, is a strategic regional initiative framed within the national Get Britain Working (GBW) policy agenda. The GBW White Paper outlines the UK government's ambition to reduce economic inactivity and achieve an 80% employment rate through systemic reforms in employment, health, and skills provision.

In Sussex, this national ambition is being translated through coordinated efforts by Brighton & Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council, and West Sussex County Council who are working collaboratively to create a Get Sussex Working Plan which will identify shared challenges and opportunities that can inform pan-Sussex priorities. This report summarises the views expressed during consultation led by the council.

The implementation plan will be informed by qualitative and quantitative data. It will identify local employment barriers, assess existing provision, and propose immediate priorities alongside a 10-year vision for inclusive economic growth. This report reflects stakeholder insights ensuring the plan is grounded and informed by knowledge and experience of those they represent, referencing what has worked previously and what could work in the future. This engagement is vital to inform local labour market transformation.

A separate report was commissioned to review local skills and employment strategies and plans, conduct labour market analysis and review the current systems and offer.

Stakeholder engagement was coordinated by Brighton and Hove City Council and delivered in partnership with Fresh Ambition Ltd. Engagement included six group discussions, one-to-one consultations with 2 key stakeholders, and direct feedback from young people and adults. A survey disseminated through the council's engagement portal was completed by 20 individuals.

1.2   Consultation themes

The consultation questions were adapted to be relevant to the audience. The key themes were centred on:

- Barriers to employment support and access to support
- The support needed for people with long term conditions or mental health needs
- Groups or individuals who may be under served or excluded from support
- The role of health providers
- Reducing inactivity
- Reaching and engaging residents
- Priorities and actions for the Get Sussex Working Plan.

1.3   Consultees

The following stakeholders were involved in the engagement.

- Council staff from a range of services
- Further Education and skills providers
- Young people and adults
- Brighton and Hove Job Centre and employability providers
- Voluntary and community sector organisations

2. Understanding Employment Barriers and Labour Market Needs

Stakeholder feedback in Brighton & Hove identified three interlinked areas central to understanding the city's labour market challenges: barriers to work, employer recruitment and retention issues, and misalignment between supply and demand.

2.1 Insight to overarching barriers

The cost of living in Brighton and Hove and housing are significant barriers to employment. People with housing challenges can have personal difficulties resulting in them being further from work. Accessing private rented accommodation if you are out of work is virtually impossible. People, particularly in insecure, temporary, and supported accommodation can generally only move forward once their primary needs are met. People in hostels and often support staff can believe that people can't work if they are living in supported accommodation and getting benefits. In fact, they can be actively

discouraged from working by their accommodation providers so not to impact their housing situation.

Stakeholders frequently cited the impact of individuals being in crisis and facing complex needs. Many clients experience multiple overlapping challenges, including physical and mental health conditions, language barriers, and difficult personal circumstances—which make it extremely hard to consider employment while managing such complexities. The intersection of substance use, mental health issues, and employability was also highlighted as particularly difficult to navigate.

It was noted that being unemployed is a barrier. Being out of work will often impact confidence, resilience, and mental health to some degree and the impact of a lack of confidence cannot be underestimated. The Work and Health Programme funded by the DWP has ended so there is a gap in provision for people on a health journey. It was suggested that employability providers and health providers could work in a more cohesive way.

The challenge of navigating services and consistency of support was raised throughout the consultation. In some cases, there is a choice of provision and identifying and navigating provision which is right for the individual is difficult. Particularly for people with overlapping issues such as disability, housing insecurity, caring responsibilities and language barriers. People need to be reassured that the service they are referred to will help them to move forward and access to appropriate support at the right time is critical. Sometimes there are waiting lists for support which is a barrier.

Whilst it was acknowledged that the Connect to Work Programme is on the horizon, it does not focus on individuals not ready to move into work and who need a longer timeframe beyond that of the programme. It was suggested that support is needed for these residents.

It was noted that there are many economically inactive people in the city who are not claiming benefits, potentially carers returning to work, people who took early retirement and who want or need to return to work. Interventions to support them outside of a 'job centre system' would be helpful.

There is a need for services to be located within communities, and some early intervention support for people who are not ready for work now but are curious and want to work in the future. We shouldn't wait for people to be ready for work before support is available. A practitioner noted:

There are huge numbers of people who are not work-ready due to mental health, housing, or confidence issues. The system isn't flexible enough to support them in a way that works."

A lack of accessible and consistent careers advice was reported. People can receive advice, guidance and support with the creation of CVs from the National Careers

Service, but regular and ongoing support is not currently within the scope of the service. This is needed, especially for people returning to the workforce after periods of illness, relationship breakdowns or caregiving. People can lack confidence at these times and sell themselves short.

Stakeholders highlighted that tailored support is essential both for individuals and for certain groups with commonality in employment barriers. This support needs to acknowledge and respond to intersectionality. Accessibility of support needs to be considered from the outset to ensure that we reach the people we want to engage with.

It was felt employment practices used by employers can be a barrier to accessing opportunities, such as a reliance on traditional qualifications, inaccessible recruitment processes, perception of a culture that is not inclusive, and lack of flexible working options. It was felt that there was an element of stigma around people in treatment for substance misuse. It was felt that employers need positive education to enhance diversity.

Whilst there is support for people on probation, there is a gap in support for ex-offenders who have been out of prison for some time who can face challenges in moving forward.

It was strongly felt that a fear of losing benefits cannot be underestimated. People have often fought for a long time to get the benefits that they're entitled to, and often they feel that they don't have the appropriate information to understand how working could impact their entitlement to benefits and Universal Credit.

Eligibility criteria to access programmes can be a barrier where people are close to the labour market but who haven't been in the country quite long enough to qualify for adult education provision.

Transport costs can limit the effectiveness of well-intentioned interventions.

Resource to support participants was identified as a challenge. Often people come into an employment adviser role on a short-term basis, and it can be a struggle to keep skilled workers which makes it harder to support people in the city.

Interventions that have a positive impact (and could be adapted to focus on employment) included proactive outreach from the benefit cap team, a cost-of-living event hosted by Family hubs (involving multiple council teams) which focused on people who were waiting for 1:1 cost of living support, was attended by 105 families. The importance of co-designing events with service uses was noted.

Apprenticeships were considered a good employment pathway, but there are less opportunities currently and therefore they are increasingly competitive. Many people cannot afford to follow an apprenticeship pathway, and the cost-of-living crisis can

impact on completion, even though the pathway may lead to better employment outcomes in the longer term.

Working with community groups in relation to aligning expectations (including cultural expectations) with the local employment situation and influencing aspirations was suggested.

2.2 Disability and health

Health-related conditions, particularly mental health conditions and long-term illness remain a barrier to work.

It was noted that people with profound and multiple learning disabilities face the biggest challenges to securing employment, however it was felt that people with disabilities are currently underserved by services. Adults including young adults with learning difficulties and disabilities were also flagged as falling through the gaps in support provision. Local practitioners noted:

> *"There's often no clear handover between services, so people bounce between education, benefits, and health support without a clear employment plan."*

> *"Mental health is a catch-all term and everyone's mental health needs are different and therefore the support that is needed is different. This takes time to unpick".*

with Stakeholders highlighted that individuals experiencing fluctuating mental health, alongside other complex needs and low confidence, may face significant challenges in accessing and sustaining employment.

Residents are generally unaware of Access to Work, but when people do apply it is slow and a real barrier to supporting people at work. Consultees questioned the effectiveness of the disability confidence scheme. Is it fit for purpose? Are businesses embedding practice for the long term? It was felt commitment to it can vary widely between organisations, whilst some employers embrace it, others do the minimum requirements.

It was felt that many employers lack awareness and understanding of learning disabilities and autism, often making assumptions about an individual's ability to work effectively. This includes beliefs that neurodivergent individuals may underperform compared to neurotypical peers or require disproportionate levels of support.

Some people with a disability and long-term health conditions may not gain formal qualifications making it hard to meet entry level job criteria, the recruitment process can also be a significant barrier. The supported employment infrastructure cannot meet demand and there is a post educational drop off after leaving education, when support provided through an Educational Health Care Plan ends.

Retention in work was identified as being especially important and the support businesses provide to ensure people maintain work is essential. Unsupported people are more likely to be absent from work due to sickness or leave employment all together.

2.3 Health and employment

Consultees understood that health services are overwhelmed and lack capacity to support employability directly. However, health and employment services were considered isolated and fragmented and a need for them to be integrated was identified.

Improving collaboration between job coaches/employment support organisations, social prescribers, and health professionals, and co production was suggested. A stronger link between health and employment outcomes was considered beneficial. To be achieved through integrating mental health and wellbeing support into employability programmes and employability outcomes into health interventions.

Embedding employment specialists in health, education settings and community settings—like GP surgeries was suggested to bridge the gap. Examples of integrated hubs were the new youth centre in Hangleton & Knoll which offers the potential for holistic support for mental health, employment, housing, and more. Another example is the Health Hub at Robert Lodge delivered by the East and Central Brighton Primary Care Network (PCN), which offers weekly drop-in sessions for residents.

Social prescribing and holistic relationship-based models, such as Supported Employment, were proven to work, especially when mental health support is integrated. The financial challenge of scaling such interventions was noted. Supported employment is a personalised approach that helps people with a disability or complex barriers to work find and maintain paid employment through tailored support, coaching, and workplace adjustments. In-work support helps retention which is good for employers. It was noted that there is a lack of services for social prescribers to refer into

Enhanced understanding of the benefits system – communicating where income comes from could be useful for health providers so that work is recognised as benefit from a financial and health perspective. A participant noted:

"We know work is good for health, but the services are siloed. People need joined-up support that doesn't make them jump through hoops."

2.4 Adults

Adults consulted reported the following barriers to finding employment: a lack of training and work placements, (particularly relevant to migrants who lack UK experience) aligning skillsets with vacancies of interest, residency and eligibility (Visa situation of Ukrainians was noted and the insecurity this brings and impact on work in the future), commuting and travel, health, neuro diversity, mental health challenges and written equal opportunities commitments that do not align with the applicants experience.

They noted the emotional toll of job searching, and the impact on self-esteem and motivation of receiving lots of rejections, and the challenges of managing health conditions.

Carers, particularly single parents, cited childcare constraints, including affordability and access to childcare as a major barrier. More advice on childcare would be helpful.

Actions that would support the transition into work included, 1:1 employment support, flexible hours, work that is closer to home, online access to courses, courses below level 3 and level 3 and above that provide a pathway to university, mentoring, networking, work placements – particularly helpful to support gaps in CV's, more apprenticeships, training that aligns with jobs, understanding the technology used in the respect and shortlisting process, adverts that make it clearer what is needed from applicants (meaning it when the job advert states no experience required), feedback from employers on applications and interviews, good in work training, and in work progression pathways. They referenced the skills required by employers included team working, time management, planning, problem solving, multi-lingual, communication and negotiation.

Professionals' consultees reported:

Local childcare provision can be unaffordable and not suitable for shift-based work. The Jobcentre reported that many parents want to go into work even before they're expected to, but they can be overwhelmed by childcare choices, the idea of moving into work, and the financial implications of childcare. More support is needed. PACE was an EU funded project delivered by the council which has ended. It was referenced as having a positive impact on supporting parents with young children to prepare for work.

Older workers were described as at risk of age-related discrimination and digital exclusion. Participants noted that this group is often overlooked by mainstream provision, despite a growing need to re-enter work due to financial pressures.

The Restart Scheme (delivered locally by FEDCAP for people in the intensive work search regime. Referrals via the job centre following 6 months unemployment) was

noted as an effective intervention to support people into work. Participants receive employment support and help to address barriers; however, employers can be reluctant to engage with people with untapped potential and new skills to offer. More work is needed to convey the benefits of working with these residents to employers. Appropriate work for people is considered essential; people cannot be expected to do any job if it does not provide the conditions needed to maintain work. Appropriate services to facilitate this are required. Social prescribing can be a good starting point for people. It is delivered by a link worker who connects people to activities, groups, and services in their community to meet the practical, social and emotional needs that affect their health and wellbeing.

2.5 Young people

Young people consulted reported the following barriers to finding employment: anxiety, mental health, lack of relevant opportunities, a lack of experience, applying for jobs, care responsibilities, transport challenges, rejection - applying and not getting a response. They also noted a lack of awareness of where to go to get support, young people may see the service being for other people and not for them, challenges at home and a lack of financial stability.

They felt that there were jobs available but they're not easy to get and that young people can be looked down upon. The jobs they cited as being available for young people included coffee shops, supermarkets, hospitality and apprenticeships. They considered that a friendly environment and good management help the transition into employment. Most of the young people consulted had some experience of the world of work through volunteering or within the education environment. However, they had received little help to prepare for work. Support considered helpful in addressing the barriers identified included regular assistance from a youth employment worker, including help to achieve qualifications and mental health support. Employers who understand and can support with mental health conditions and neurodiversity. Training considered useful included short courses - time management and business awareness. They wanted more opportunities for work experience, help to find an apprenticeship and help with CVs.

Actions that would make job opportunities feel more accessible and inclusive to young people included pre work training, a friendly introduction to the workplace, working with other young people, employers that were welcoming and accepting of employing young people, additional support for care leavers - including through the application process and better communication when applicants have not been successful.

Professional consultees reported barriers:

There was a consensus that mental health is the major issue, and other health conditions and special educational needs are also barriers to getting into employment.

Young people particularly those Not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET) and those who are care experienced often lack the confidence, networks, and skills needed to transition into work. One youth provider remarked:

"The jump from college to work is too big for some. They need supported internships or traineeships that lead somewhere."

The misalignment with the skills young people have relevant to the jobs in the city and the lack of opportunity to gain those skills, coupled with a fall in the number of apprenticeships available to young people, are significant issues.

The complexity of unpicking economic inactivity, and the numerous reasons for it, means that an approach for one person is not right for another. The financial situation of young people and their families is crucial in people deciding to be economically active again. It was felt the benefits system sometimes seems to work against people.

It was felt there is a significant lack of suitable opportunities for young people now. A reduction in apprenticeships has removed a transitionary pathway that trains, builds confidence and upskills young people. Kickstart was referenced as a programme that did make a real difference to young people. A professional commented:

There is a need to support young people to get into work and to enable them to see work as a viable option for them as many do not.

2.6 Refugees and migrants

Many refugees and migrants want to engage and economically contribute, they may need support over and above what British people receive, and it is often not available. Employers may have some misconceptions related to rights to work or lack of certifications or references.

Gaps in employability support for refugees and asylum seekers were frequently highlighted. They often face language barriers, challenges in navigating an unfamiliar job market and encounter cultural differences and, at times, employer bias. Even those with professional backgrounds may find it difficult to have their qualifications recognised, limiting their access to suitable employment opportunities.

Providing a 'first UK work experience offer' which helps get a foot in the door would be hugely beneficial, as it will help facilitate future employment opportunities

Professionals commented:

We need a group of companies in the city that would be willing to have people come in and have that opportunity.

"We're wasting talent. People come with degrees and experience but can't access work due to qualification challenges or a lack of employer confidence."

Interventions that would support people include: co designing and delivering services that address the distinct barriers faced; raising the profile of these interventions so that they are seen as integral and not a bolt on to employability services; using community leaders and peer led support programmes for marginalised groups as these create trusted relationships; utilise social media channels used by different groups of people to extend reach (Ukrainians use Telegram widely), business start-up advice, increasing ESOL provision, using staff who have lived experience and can relate to individuals, and employability support. Outreach to where people are is important as well as effective evaluation of programmes so that interventions can be assessed and enhanced.

Supporting refugees and migrants can take time, and it is not unusual for them to need long term support. It was noted that the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) creates strong and meaningful relationships with communities. Both the support needed and who is best to deliver that support needs to be factored into programmes.

Concerns were expressed about the ending of funding which has facilitated services i.e. Homes for Ukraine Scheme and Shared Prosperity Funding. Some services face imminent funding challenges, and the loss of funding will undermine the strong relationships that have been created over time. It was noted that following the ending of EU funding and Skills and Employability being incorporated into Shared Prosperity Funding, coupled with a shift to centralisation of funding through Connect to Work, means that less funding is available to VCS organisations to deliver neighbourhood centric interventions.

2.7 Digital

Digital was and continues to be a significant barrier across all age groups. Respondents stressed the need for digital skills training, access to devices and data, and assistive technology for people with a disability. One-to-one digital support is seen as particularly effective. It was noted that not all young people are "digital natives" and may lack essential digital skills for employment.

2.8 Employers

Employers reported ongoing difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff for local sectors including care, hospitality, retail, and construction. These challenges could be attributed to the undesirability of these sectors, a lack of accessible upskilling routes and skills gaps in applicants. Data from the Local Skills Improvement Plan reinforces this, noting recruitment strain in mid-skill roles due to both candidate shortages and mismatched expectations.

An employer noted:

"Recruitment is hard. There's a lot of churn, because the roles aren't seen as aspirational. We need to rethink how we support progression and motivation in these sectors."

Retention was also identified as a systemic issue. Employers highlighted the difficulty of supporting their own staff with complex personal challenges. Supporting employer to understand what actions they can take to ensure that their places of work remain accessible was considered important.

Employers reported that the pressure on front-line roles including burnout were contributors to high turnover.

Although Brighton & Hove has a relatively skilled workforce, stakeholders noted a persistent disconnect between qualifications and job readiness.

The Brighton & Hove Inclusive Economy Strategy (2023) similarly highlights this disconnect, emphasising the need for more work-based training, employer involvement, and flexible learning models. Additionally, transport costs, childcare access, and the impact of health issues further limited access to suitable opportunities.

The Local Skills Improvement Plan report highlighted that many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) lack the internal resources to participate in employment -based learning schemes without dedicated support. This resonated during the consultation. One employer said:

"We want to help but don't know who to talk to. There's too much duplication—we're constantly being asked to support different programmes with no clear ask."

2.9 Education and skills providers

Meeting health and well-being needs, providing appropriate wrap around support as well as delivering the qualifications is challenging. These needs will continue into the next phase of the young person's life if not addressed. Funding to support additional interventions would be welcome, particularly for disadvantaged learners. This includes supporting young people to have the confidence to see and think about themselves as working people as many do not, supporting them to access help available and identifying appropriate career pathways. Using steppingstones rather than leaps will make the transition towards employment more achievable.

It was noted that young people who do not regularly attend college will have barriers to accessing support, are at risk of becoming NEET often need additional support. Those electively home educated are likely to be further removed from support opportunities and potentially less prepared. Effective transition support from year 11 into post 16 education can support retention and reduce the likelihood of becoming NEET. More detailed information from schools relating to vulnerability would be helpful. However, information about young people who have not attended school is a gap.

Skills Bootcamps will be delivered in the city by some of the providers consulted. To date their availability in the city has been minimal – promotion of Bootcamps to ensure the offer reaches across the city was considered important. The opportunity to use them as a pathway into employment for current learners leaving education was suggested.

A lack of careers advise was noted, decentralisaion of careers advice for young people means less control over delivery of the service and the need for Continuing Professional Development for careers advisers was needed.

Some vocational courses were seen as insufficiently aligned with employer needs or lacking the wraparound support that enables learners to succeed. One educator reflected:

"Young people leave with certificates but there can be a disconnect in application to the work place, resulting in them leaving employment which is disheartening for them."

There are challenges for young people with a learning disability. Expanding supported internships is being explored. Using support workers to attend work tasters and work experience is helpful but funding can be an issue.

2.10 Commissioning and funding

Consultees were keen to ensure that significant structural barriers were noted. Namely, fragmented commissioning - multiple commissioners of provision (NHS, DWP, ICB, various government departments). Short-term funding and less of it, risks the sustainability of services. This can lead to a lack of trust within the community as people become frustrated and lose confidence in services which come and go. Stakeholders also noted duplication of services and fatigue among employers and participants to engage in various and competing programmes.

3. Insights

3.1 Insights on economically inactive individuals

It was felt that some economically inactive residents are 'discouraged workers'— who have disengaged from the job market due to past negative experiences, health limitations, or the complex rules and systems related to claiming benefits. The Local Skills Improvement Plan and Public Health data both underscore the link between health inequalities and low labour market participation. Participants stressed the need for proactive outreach and flexible pathways to re-engage this group. One health-linked service provider stated:

"We can't reactively wait for people to come to us for support. We need to go to them— to their communities, in their GP surgeries, wherever they feel safe."

These insights reflect the need for tailored interventions and systemic adjustments that prioritise inclusion, localised interventions, and longer-term employability support where needed, reinforcing the need for and importance of the VCS community and local hubs and venues.

3.2 Insights on current employment schemes and support

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of co-designed, trauma-informed services that reflect the lived experience of users. There was strong support for community-based hubs that offer holistic support—blending employability, health, and housing services in one accessible setting. Flexible delivery, wraparound support, and relationship-based approaches were consistently advocated. One VCS leader explained:

"People need more than CV support they need trust, consistency, and someone who sees their potential even when they don't."

The Brighton & Hove Inclusive Economy Strategy advocates similar principles, calling for inclusive models that centre equity and adaptability.

Employers expressed mixed views on existing schemes. While there was general support for apprenticeships and work experience models, stakeholders noted barriers including administrative complexity, lack of wraparound support, and concerns about work readiness.

Whilst stakeholders view flexible work arrangements as increasingly vital for inclusion, particularly for carers, older workers, and those with health conditions. Not all employers felt equipped to implement flexible roles without clearer guidance or shared examples of good practice.

While some employers actively contribute to supporting employment pathways, others remain disengaged, most likely due to perceived complexity of the system or lack of capacity. The importance of brokerage roles was emphasised that could mediate between a provider and employer. An employer said:

"When someone introduces a candidate who's prepped, and we know who to call if it's not working, we're much more likely to say yes.".

There was widespread recognition of the need to support and train employers in adopting inclusive recruitment practices. Stakeholders cited unconscious bias, risk aversion, and limited understanding of reasonable adjustments as barriers to hiring people with health conditions, criminal records, or non-traditional qualifications.

Several participants called for targeted support to help employers build confidence in supporting diverse hires, including training, peer networks, and toolkits. Emphasising the strengths and the breadth that diversity can bring. There is a need to be aware that

smaller businesses are likely to need more support than the larger businesses. A consultee noted:

"We need to move beyond awareness to practical change—what does inclusion look like in real life, for a small employer?"

The Brighton & Hove Inclusive Economy Strategy called for public and anchor institutions to lead by example, adopting procurement and hiring policies that prioritise inclusion and social value. They are pivotal to creating employment pathways, but greater integration with employment and welfare services is also required.

Stakeholders from business, education, and the VCS sector all pointed to inconsistent and fragmented approaches to employer engagement across Brighton & Hove. Collectively, these insights suggest that improving employer engagement will require resource, a systemic approach—coordinated communication, practical support for inclusive hiring, and enhanced collaboration between business, support services, and training providers.

4. Collaboration and opportunities

Stakeholders widely acknowledged that Brighton & Hove benefits from a committed ecosystem of public, private, and voluntary and community organisations engaged in employment and skills where collaboration is strong. However, there is a call for more integrated planning (mapping of services) and shared accountability, co-location of services. Duplication of effort and unclear referral pathways were common concerns. It was noted that there are often similarities required to support unique cohorts so these should be explored more widely, for example challenges faced by people with a disability and refugees. One partner noted:

"There are great initiatives, but they don't always connect. We need a shared map of what's available and where the overlaps and gaps are."

The Inclusive Economy Strategy stressed the value of place-based partnerships and recommend co-located service hubs to address these coordination gaps.

It was felt that that the economic priorities of the city, shrinking and growing employment sectors and the jobs available now and in the future need to be communicated with more transparency to support pathways to work.

Education and skills providers emphasised the importance of aligning curricula with local labour market needs. Participants called for real-world engagement through placements, employer talks, and input into curriculum design. However, time and resource are constraints. A representative from a college noted:

"We want to be responsive, but the system doesn't make it easy. We need dedicated staff to work with employers and keep the content fresh."

The Local Skills Improvement Plan identified similar issues, advocating for stronger strategic partnerships between education providers and industry to ensure learners are equipped with relevant skills.

In relation to health opportunities, they lie in integrated co-located services, training, and joint working across health and employment sectors to deliver inclusive, person-centered support.

The Brighton & Hove Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy supports this, advocating for integrated approaches to tackling health inequalities and promoting inclusive economic participation.

Peer-led support programmes for marginalised groups were considered effective. Digital skills hubs, embedded employment specialists in health settings, and trauma-informed training for providers were also cited.

Stakeholders emphasised the need to utilise what is available. For example, Job Centre Work Experience Programmes which do not affect benefits. Sussex Housing Trust offer a successful placement programme that provides a package of support and is a safe way for people to re-enter the workforce. Recognising the value of volunteering as a pathway to employment was also noted as important. Investment in what works and share learning across the system and co-design services with those who use them was recommended. A participant noted:

"Innovation doesn't always mean new—it means doing what we know works, at scale and with consistency."

Feedback highlighted a desire for cross-sector leadership groups, shared outcome frameworks, and better use of data to inform planning. Participants also recommended inclusive co-design processes that involve people with lived experience in shaping services. A participant noted:

"We talk about partnership but often it's just consultation. We need shared decision-making if we want shared outcomes."

Several groups were identified as underrepresented in current strategic planning: small ethnic minority led organisations, micro-enterprises, informal carers, and faith-based groups. Stakeholders urged efforts to broaden participation and recognise the value of grassroots insights.

The role of libraries was recognised, they are libraries of sanctuary, and they provide a welcoming environment, access to computers and play an important role in bringing communities together.

Relationships and collaboration with the Job centre was considered strong, and there was recognition of the work they do to engage with stakeholders as well as supporting people into work.

Locally relevant, outcomes-focused performance measures that reflect both quantitative and qualitative impacts were suggested. Participants called for indicators that capture progression, health improvements, and participant satisfaction, rather than just employment outcomes.

Examples of best practice and innovation was shared including:

- Work undertaken by council services - Youth Employment Hub, BIPC, Family Hubs, Adult Education Hub, Skills and Employment
- Sussex Housing Trust – Work Placement Programme
- Social prescribing and community engagement teams connecting with adult learning to facilitate support for clients.
- DV8 ran a transition event for young people who have been home educated (25 attendees)
- Clubhouse Connect (Fedcap) supports structure, social interactions, and confidence.
- Public Health's holistic approach to supporting residents is effective.
- Community-led employment support models.
- Integrated mental health and employability services (IPS - Southdown/CGL)
- YMCA Evolve – niche teams with specialities in drugs and alcohol and in the hostels
- Models from Greater Manchester and Camden were cited as models to explore. Particularly regarding integrated health and employment pathways and neighbourhood-based delivery models.
- Learning from organisations like Timpsons who have successfully worked with Ex offenders for years.