APPENDIX 1

New Forest Skills Action Plan 2025-2030

New Forest DISTRICT COUNCIL

June 2025

New Forest District Council is grateful for the work undertaken by EKOS Consultancy in supporting the preparation of this Skills Action Plan.

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Executive Summary

The New Forest Skills Action Plan (NFSAP) 2025–2030 sets out a clear, place-based strategy to ensure that all residents and businesses in the New Forest can thrive in a rapidly changing economy. Commissioned by New Forest District Council (NFDC), the plan responds to local challenges such as an ageing population, young people moving away from the area, skills shortages, and the need to transition to a low-carbon economy. It also capitalises on major opportunities, including the Solent Freeport and the redevelopment of the Fawley Power Station site.

The NFSAP aligns with NFDC's Corporate Plan 2024–2028, which is built around the priorities of People, Place, and Prosperity:

- **People:** Supporting residents to access lifelong learning, upskilling, and employment opportunities.
- **Place:** Protecting and enhancing the New Forest's natural capital through a nature-positive, low-carbon transition.
- **Prosperity:** Enabling inclusive economic growth and supporting local businesses to innovate and grow.

Vision

The vision of the Skills Action Plan is to build a skilled, resilient workforce for the New Forest—driving inclusive, nature-positive growth through collaborative, place-based skills planning.

Strategic Objectives

The NFSAP sets out four strategic objectives to deliver this vision:

Inclusive growth

We will enable everyone in the New Forest to participate in and benefit from economic, social and environmental growth, being prepared to capitalise on emerging opportunities through entrepreneurship and with a particular focus on priority target groups to tackle inequalities in access to skills and employment.

A nature positive transition to a low carbon economy whilst also supporting key established sectors

We will work with key partners to deliver key skills for conservation, land and forestry management, and renewable technologies to support a nature positive transition to a low carbon economy whilst also strengthening the workforce in key established sectors.

Lifelong learning and upskilling opportunities for all

We will enable all residents to be empowered with the knowledge, skills and confidence to make informed career decisions about their education, training and career paths leading to improved employment outcomes, lifelong learning and prosperity.

Effective coordination of skills delivery

We will work with key education providers to ensure a coordinated and effective skills delivery programme for the New Forest that avoids duplication and addresses gaps in provision.

Priority Actions

To deliver the vision and achieve the strategic objectives the plan sets out 32 high-level actions. These will be developed over the coming months by the NFDC Economic Development Service with strategic oversight coming from the New Forest Skills Group. The group will be made up of representatives from key stakeholders in skills delivery across the New Forest.

Next Steps

The immediate next step is the formation of the New Forest Skills Group, which will coordinate the implementation of the action plan. This group will work collaboratively with partners across the public, private, education, and voluntary sectors to:

- Align skills investment with local priorities.
- Coordinate joint initiatives, including targeted grant funding and employer engagement.
- Support the development of the new Local Plan and ensure skills planning is embedded in wider regeneration and infrastructure strategies.

The NFSAP will be regularly monitored and evaluated to ensure it remains responsive to local needs and delivers measurable impact.

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1 Background

1.1 Why This Research Was Commissioned

New Forest District Council (NFDC) commissioned this research in 2024 to more fully understand the local skills landscape. With new opportunities and challenges emerging, especially linked to the Solent Freeport, it became clear that a more detailed and localised approach to skills planning was needed.

The Freeport is expected to bring major investment and job creation to the region, particularly in the New Forest area, which makes up around 70% of the Freeport's tax base. However, there are concerns that existing regional skills strategies may not fully address the unique challenges faced by the New Forest, such as:

- Isolated rural communities
- Poor public transport
- An older-than-average population
- High cost of living
- Difficulty retaining young people
- A large number of small businesses and self-employed workers

NFDC wanted to ensure that future skills programmes are tailored to help address these local realities. They asked EKOS (an independent consultancy specialising in economic and social research) to gather evidence, speak with local employers and education providers, and assess whether current plans will meet the area's needs. The goal is to shape a more effective, inclusive, and place-based approach to skills development that supports both residents and businesses in the New Forest.

1.2 Developing the NFSAP

Our Skills Action Plan for the New Forest (NFSAP) represents New Forest District Council's (NFDC) and local partners' commitment to collaborative working across the New Forest. It embeds an evidence-based approach to skills planning, investment, and delivery that is closely aligned with the needs of employers and the local economy.

The NFSAP development was managed by NFDC in collaboration with a New Forest research skills advisory group (NFSAG) that included the New Forest National Park Authority (NFNPA), Brockenhurst College, Totton College, Community First, Solent Business and Skills Solutions, Hampshire Chamber of Commerce, Hampshire County Council, Youth Options, Solent University, and Southampton City Council.

The plan is evidence-based, drawing on the most recent skills data, built up from existing official datasets including Office for National Statistics, Annual Population Survey, Business Register and Employment Survey, UK Business Count, Census 2021, and Lightcast job postings data.

Following an initial workshop with the NFSAG, consultations were conducted with more than 30 regional stakeholders representing the main institutions and sectors engaged within the New Forest economy and skills system. An online survey with regional employers gathered a further 65 responses. Two focus groups with students from Brockenhurst College and Totton College were also held. A final workshop was hosted with the NFSAG to test the findings and gather feedback to refine the outline plan.

Further details of the research and engagement undertaken to inform this Skills Action Plan is set out in the accompanying Technical Report.

2 Context

2.1 New Forest Economy and Labour Market

This section draws on data analysis and intelligence detailed in the accompanying Technical Report to highlight the key economic and labour market issues across the New Forest. The key findings suggest:

Ageing population & workforce decline: The New Forest's working-age (aged 16-64) population is shrinking, with projections suggesting a 10% contraction by 2043 if observed trends continue into the future. This potential demographic shift poses significant challenges for the vibrancy and sustainability of the local economy.

Jobs are often lower paid & more part-time work: The local job market is heavily concentrated in lower-paid foundational and service sectors, with health and accommodation each accounting for 11% of employment. While part-time roles align with the New Forest's strengths in tourism and the rural economy, part-time employment levels are higher than the national average across most sectors.

Decline in key industries: Employment in manufacturing has fallen by 14% and construction by 17%, despite their importance to the local economy and the transition to net-zero. Ensuring that skills pathways support both replacement demand and future workforce needs in these sectors is critical.

Job demand: Current jobs demand continues to be in lower-paid foundational and service sectors with key employers being NHS, recruiters for teaching assistants (particularly SEN), chefs, care workers, and cleaners

Rising unemployment & economic strain: There is an increasing reliance on unemployment-related benefits in the New Forest which has been most pronounced in areas with existing deprivation, such as Totton and Eling, and Hythe and Dibden.

Earnings & gender pay gap: Wages in the New Forest are affected by higher rates of part-time and lower-qualified work, particularly among women. In 2024, the gross weekly median pay for full-time workers in the New Forest was £668, significantly below the national average of £732. Men earned £801 per week, while women earned £594, marking a £207 weekly pay gap. This gender pay gap has widened since 2014 when the gap stood at £173 per week.

2.2 National and Regional Policy

A review of national and regional strategies and policy outlines the operating environment in which the NFSAP has been developed. Table 2.1, below, provides an overview of the main documents considered to support development of the plan.

Table 2.1: Policy and strategic documents (grouped by level)

National Policy

Organisation	Document(s)
UK Government	- English Devolution White Paper - UK Government Plan for Change - Get Britain Working - Apprenticeship Funding Rules: August 2024 – July 2025
Skills England	Driving Growth and Widening Opportunities
Local Government Association	Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Hub

County / Sub-Regional Policy

Organisation	Document(s)
Hampshire County Council	- Hampshire Economic Strategy - Hampshire Skills Strategy - Scope
Hampshire Chamber of Commerce	Solent Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)
Solent Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)	Solent Skills Action Plan & Local Skills Report
Solent Growth Partnership	Solent Growth & Prosperity Strategy
Solent Freeport	Solent Freeport

District Policy

Organisation	Document(s)
New Forest District Council	- Corporate Plan 2024–2028 - Transformation Strategy 2024–2028 (Future New Forest – Transforming Tomorrow, Together) - Local Plan 2016-2036 Part One (adopted July 2020)

2.3 Hampshire overview

Economic development strategies for Hampshire and the Solent highlight key growth sectors driving regional prosperity, including marine and maritime manufacturing, digital, and creative industries. Notably, IT and construction are forecast to have the largest increase in skills demand across Hampshire and the Solent, fuelled by rapid digitisation and evolving infrastructure needs.

A major strength of the region is its robust skills and education ecosystem, with 27 Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) providers delivering post-16 education and training across Hampshire.

Hampshire and Solent wide growth barriers

Several short- and long-term barriers to economic growth across the county are identified in the Hampshire and Solent wide studies and strategies:

Short term challenges	**Long term challenges**
• Post-COVID labour market recovery	• Ageing population and shrinking workforce.

• Ongoing skills shortages and unfilled vacancies • Weak demand for commercial property, particularly office space • Cost-of-living pressures on households and businesses • Rising inflation • Brexit-related trade disruptions	• Declining in-migration, both from within the UK and abroad. • Shortages in construction, IT, and green economy roles. • Climate change and infrastructure vulnerabilities (including increased flooding) • Persistent skills gaps and slow workforce development

Of specific relevance to the New Forest, are the following issues:

Skills gaps and mismatch

The New Forest faces acute skills shortages in both traditional and emerging sectors. Long-established industries such as hospitality and tourism, agriculture, and land-based services continue to struggle with workforce shortages due to an ageing population and youth outmigration. Newer sectors, such as renewable energy, decarbonisation, and engineering, require a more adaptable, tech-enabled skill base. These mismatches must be addressed to ensure the area can meet future labour market demands.

Housing affordability and availability

The lack of affordable housing in the New Forest, particularly in relation to local wage levels, hinders the area's ability to attract and retain workers. This contributes to youth outmigration and exacerbates workforce shortages across multiple sectors, impacting long-term economic sustainability.

Connectivity and infrastructure

As a rural area, the New Forest struggles with limited transport links and digital connectivity. Poor access to employment, training, and education, especially in isolated communities, reduces productivity and creates barriers for both individuals and businesses. Investment in public and digital infrastructure is essential to unlock economic potential.

Transition to a Low-Carbon Economy

With its strong land-based economy and environmental assets, the New Forest is well positioned to lead on nature-positive and low-carbon growth. However, the transition will require targeted upskilling and reskilling, particularly in hospitality and tourism, agriculture, and construction, to meet the needs of a greener economy and reduce emissions across sectors. Targeted support (for example, through the UK Government's 'Skills for Careers' campaign) will be required for workers in high-carbon sectors to upskill and reskill as part of the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Inequality and regional disparities

Marginalised groups, including young people not in education or training (NEETs), older workers and women entering or re-entering the workforce, face barriers to employment and training in the New Forest. Tackling these disparities through inclusive growth strategies and community-based skills provision is a core aim of the NFSAP.

Business Investment and Innovation

Stimulating investment and encouraging innovation are vital for the New Forest's economic resilience. Key opportunities lie in renewable energy, tourism, and agriculture. The Solent Freeport offers further potential to attract high-value businesses, but the region must also invest in workforce development to meet growing sector demands.

Hampshire wide skills priorities

In response, national and regional strategies have identified the following skills priorities:

- Upskilling and reskilling the workforce
- Expanding education and training access
- Stronger collaboration between businesses, educators, and local authorities
- Better career awareness among young people
- Removing systemic barriers to participation in training and employment

A place-based response for the New Forest

While these strategic priorities set the direction for Hampshire and the wider Solent region, the New Forest requires a more tailored place-based response, directly addressing the area's specific economic, social, and environmental needs. This includes targeted investment in local skills pathways, support for priority sectors, and inclusive, community-led strategies to ensure all residents and businesses benefit from future growth.

Solent Freeport

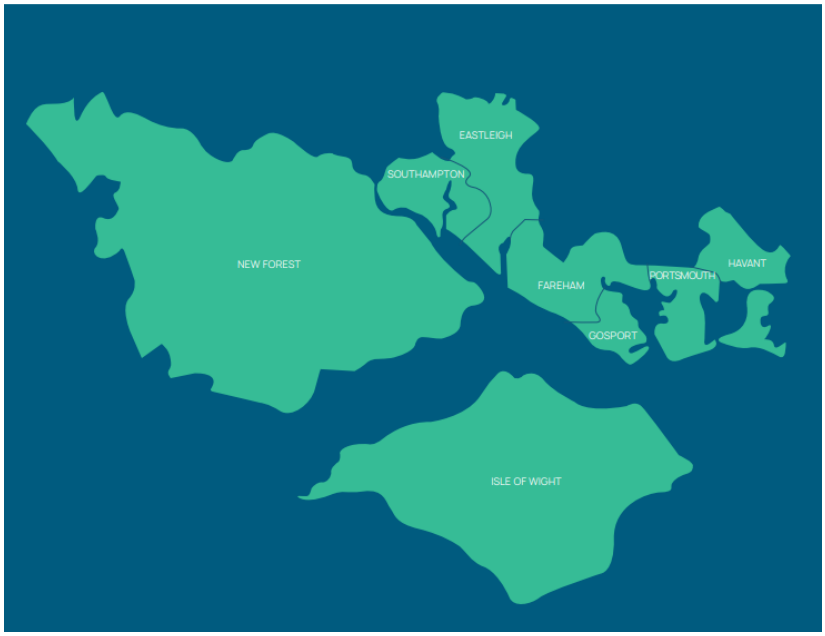
The Solent Freeport was designated by the UK Government in December 2022. Freeports were developed as site-specific hubs for global trade, investment, and innovation in the UK to encourage business growth and opportunities, supporting the regional economy. The Solent Freeport is one of 12 Freeports within the UK.

Within the Freeport sites, businesses can benefit from advantages such as:

- Tax reliefs: business rates relief and enhanced capital allowances
- Customs benefits: simplified customs procedures

It should be noted that whilst the Solent Freeport designation includes sites across a wide geography which also experience their own unique skills challenges and demand, the majority of sites are within New Forest District – Figure 2.1.

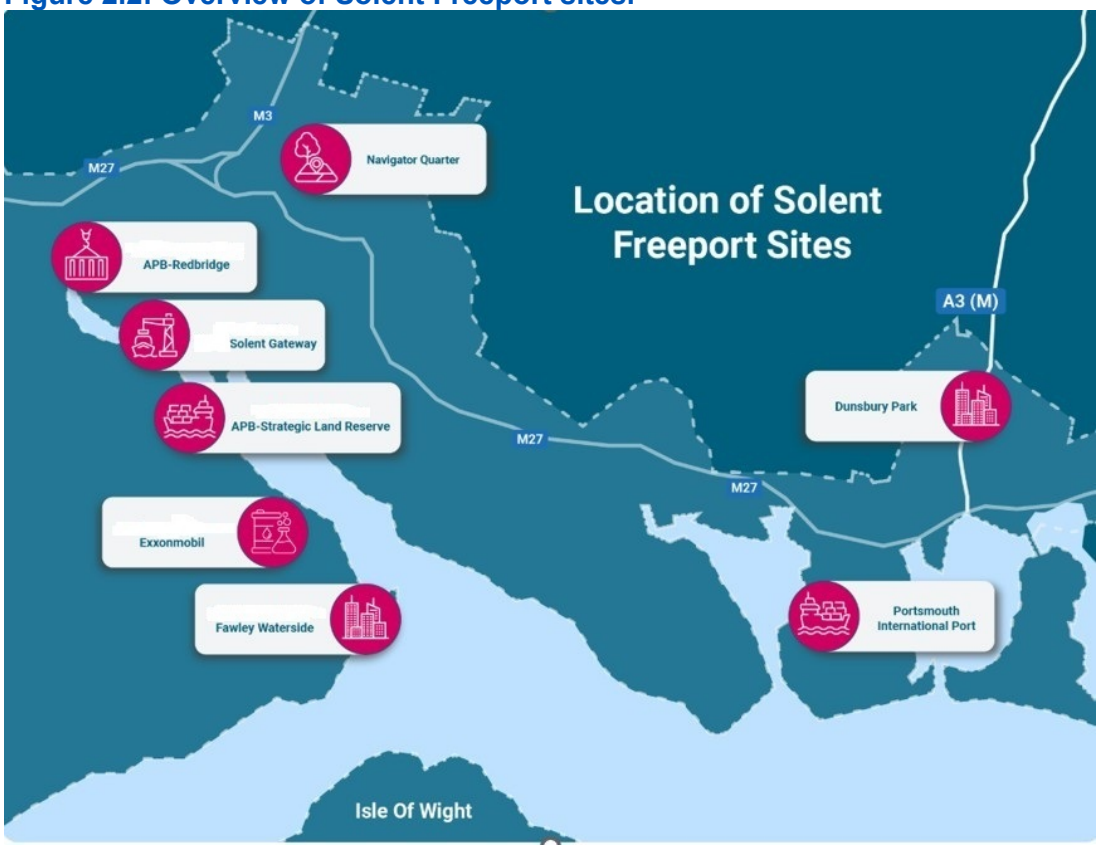
Figure 2.1: Solent Freeport Area



Source: Solent Local Skills Improvement Plan.

Located on the south coast, the Solent Freeport has a strong geographical advantage which will be used to strengthen trading relationships and drive economic growth. There is also a strong focus on sustainable development, innovation and decarbonisation.

Figure 2.2: Overview of Solent Freeport sites.



The Solent Freeport has a number of target sectors for growth and opportunity, including:

- Port activities and logistics
- Marine manufacturing and technology
- Advanced manufacturing
- Clean growth and decarbonisation

It is important that the NFSAP acknowledges the sectoral opportunities that can be realised, and addresses any skills challenges, gaps or shortages – whilst supporting residents and businesses in the New Forest to leverage maximum benefit from the opportunity.

Devolution Deal and Local Government Reorganisation

In December 2024, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published the English Devolution White Paper, outlining their plans to reform local government. This focused on mayoral devolution and local government reorganisation, developing strategic authorities to replace the existing two-tier system of district and county councils. Devolution aims to enable strategic authorities to make necessary and strategic decisions that benefit their area and population by transferring powers and funding from national to local government and changing how these powers and funding are organised between councils.

The proposed devolution deal for Hampshire and the Solent aims to transfer certain powers and responsibilities from central government to a new Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA), encompassing Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council, Isle of Wight Council, and Southampton City Council. This proposed restructuring is expected to impact local governance and service delivery, including the development and implementation of skills planning in the New Forest. The District Council will continue to proactively engage in securing the best possible outcome for the New Forest though any future Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation deal.

New Forest District Council Corporate Plan

The NFDC Corporate Plan 2024-2028 focuses on people, place, and prosperity and aims to ensure that the council invest in their people and services to meet customer needs, protect the council's financial position, and embed sustainability.

Within the prosperity priority, the Corporate Plan aims to promote a strong local economy via partnerships, investment, and increasing skills and employment opportunities. It acknowledges that

there are challenges within the New Forest with a need for the Council to ensure that residents of working age have the necessary skills to access employment within the area.

Additionally, the Plan highlights that there are opportunities arising from the Solent Freeport to develop green skills provision across the wider New Forest, with associated benefits for tourism.

To achieve this, the plan seeks to 'champion skills and access to job opportunities' by:

- Developing an employment and skills strategy informed by skills assessments
- Working with partners to support residents' access to employment opportunities and tackle barriers to employment
- Encouraging employment and skills training to address emerging opportunities and local skills needs, aligned to Solent Freeport proposals, the green agenda and key sectors within the New Forest (marine, tourism, land and nature-based sector).

2.4 Skills Strategies

National Skills Planning

As of March 2025, England's Skills Strategy encompasses several key initiatives aimed at enhancing technical education, addressing skills shortages and promoting lifelong learning:

- **T Levels**: Introduced in 2020, T Levels are two-year technical courses designed for students aged 16-18, developed in collaboration with employers to align with industry needs. They combine classroom learning with substantial industry placements, preparing students for skilled employment, Higher Education, or apprenticeships.
- **Skills for Life**: This national strategy focuses on improving adult skills by offering free education and training in areas such as digital literacy, numeracy, and transferable skills. It includes various programs like Skills Bootcamps, apprenticeships, and vocational qualifications, aiming to enhance employability and support career progression.
- **Skills England**: Skills England is a planned executive agency intended to replace the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. Its goal is to increase flexibility in skills training, address regional skills shortages, and optimise the use of the apprenticeship levy. The agency's creation responds to the significant rise in skills shortages, which accounted for 36% of job vacancies between 2017 and 2022.

Within their 2024/25 apprenticeship funding rules, the UK Government introduced a range of changes to apprenticeships to increase the number of apprentices able to qualify each year and boost economic growth.

This included:

- Greater flexibility in English and Maths requirements for apprenticeships – extending flexibilities for apprentices with learning difficulties or disabilities, but do not have an Education, Health and Care Plan
- Reducing the administrative requirements for learning support – reviews will now occur every three months, rather than monthly, and assessments for learning support can happen at any time throughout the apprenticeship
- Reducing the administrative requirements relating to onboarding an apprentice and monitoring progress – integrating the initial assessment with the development of the training plan to reduce the number of documents needing to be developed, reviewed and signed by employers and providers. Employers also do not need to sign off on each progress review.

These initiatives collectively aim to create a more responsive and efficient skills development system in England, aligning education and training with the evolving demands of the economy and supporting individuals in achieving their career aspirations.

Get Britain Working

The Get Britain Working initiative, introduced by the UK Government in late 2024, aims to tackle economic inactivity and boost employment across the country. Backed by a £240 million investment, the programme focuses on addressing the root causes of worklessness by integrating employment support with health and social care services at the local level.

Key components include the Connect to Work scheme, which offers voluntary employment support to individuals with disabilities or health conditions, and the development of tailored local plans to reduce economic inactivity. The overarching goal is to create an inclusive labour market where everyone has the opportunity to participate and progress in work.

The Get Britain Working initiative could offer significant opportunities for the New Forest, where the focus on integrating employment support with health and social care services can help address barriers to work in rural areas.

Local skills planning should ensure that people facing economic inactivity can access the support and training needed to secure employment, contributing to a more inclusive local workforce.

Skills England: Driving Growth and Widening Opportunities

The Skills England report: Driving Growth and Widening Opportunities, published in September 2024, outlines the key skills challenges limiting economic growth and opportunities across England. As the inaugural publication from the newly established Skills England, the report identifies critical skills shortages, particularly in sectors such as health and social care, construction, and clean energy.

It also highlights the need for a more coordinated and flexible skills system to meet the demands of the next decade. The report serves as a foundational document for Skills England's mission to align education and training with economic needs, reduce regional disparities, and support the government's broader industrial strategy.

The report highlights critical skill shortages across key sectors, such as health and social care and clean energy, which directly impacts the New Forest's economy. Skills England's focus on a coordinated and flexible skills system can support the New Forest's efforts to address these gaps, ensuring that the local workforce has the necessary skills to meet the evolving demands of the area's industries, particularly in the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Lifelong Learning Entitlement

The Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) is a key reform in England that aims to give individuals greater flexibility and control over their learning and career development. Launched in 2025, it provides adults with a loan entitlement equivalent to four years of post-18 education (around £37,000), which can be used over their lifetime for full or modular study at levels 4 to 6. This supports reskilling and upskilling, making it easier for people to adapt to changing labour market demands, access higher education in smaller chunks, and pursue new opportunities throughout their careers.

The LLE reform will seek to provide adults in the New Forest with greater opportunities for reskilling and upskilling. With flexible access to higher education and training, this initiative will enable individuals to adapt to the changing demands of emerging jobs in clean energy and decarbonisation technology, ultimately enhancing workforce resilience and enabling career progression across the region.

3 Action Plan

3.1 Vision

"To build a skilled, resilient workforce for the New Forest—driving inclusive, nature-positive growth through collaborative, place-based skills planning".

Our vision is to build a skilled, resilient workforce that reflects the unique character of the New Forest - supporting sustainable, inclusive growth through a place-based approach to skills planning. By embedding nature-positive solutions and preparing for a low-carbon future, we will enable local people and businesses to thrive while protecting the area's natural environment.

3.2 Skills objectives for the New Forest

Based on the New Forest specific opportunities and challenges identified, and the wider policy context, four key objectives for the Skills Action Plan are identified:

Inclusive growth

We will enable everyone in the New Forest to participate in and benefit from economic, social and environmental growth, being prepared to capitalise on emerging opportunities through entrepreneurship and with a particular focus on priority target groups to tackle inequalities in access to skills and employment

A nature positive transition to a low carbon economy whilst also supporting key established sectors

We will work with key partners to deliver key skills for conservation, land and forestry management, and renewable technologies to support a nature positive transition to a low carbon economy whilst also strengthening the workforce in key established sectors

Lifelong learning and upskilling opportunities for all

We will enable all residents to be empowered with the knowledge, skills and confidence to make informed career decisions about their education, training and career paths leading to improved employment outcomes, lifelong learning and prosperity.

Effective coordination of skills delivery

We will work with key education providers to ensure a coordinated and effective skills delivery programme for the New Forest that avoids duplication and addresses gaps in provision

3.3 Priority actions

The NFSAP is a strategic document and the action list whilst directly links to seven themes provides high level proposals in terms of next steps. The development of specific interventions to address challenges, support opportunities and achieve the strategic objectives of the plan will be led by NFDC Economic Development Service as part of it's the yearly service plan cycle. However, to oversee and coordinate this work, a New Forest Skills Group will be set up including representatives of key stakeholders in skills deliver across the New Forest. This collaboration is critical in ensuring the actions of the NFSAP are delivered.

Action	Theme	Timeframe
	Theme 1: Aligning Skills with Emerging Opportunities	
Actions	• Offer specialised courses and certifications in renewable energy (solar, wind, etc.), green technologies, and sustainable practices	2026/27
	• Develop and promote training programmes (both apprenticeships and work-based training opportunities) that focus on trade, innovation, and job creation within the Solent Freeport	2026/27
	• Encourage training pathways in energy efficiency, waste reduction, and low-carbon technologies	2025/26
	• Implement training and development programmes focused on carbon reduction strategies, nature-based solutions, and sustainable land management practices.	2026/27
	Theme 2: Supporting Established Sectors	T
Actions	• Develop and expand training programmes in customer service, hospitality management, and tourism, with a focus on improving visitor experiences and supporting sustainable tourism practices.	2025/26
	• Provide targeted training programmes for healthcare professionals and social care workers, addressing the growing demand for these services.	2025/26
	• Expand training opportunities (both apprenticeships and work-based training opportunities) in construction trades such as plumbing, electrics, carpentry, and plastering, as well as other technical skills needed for local infrastructure projects.	2025
	• Create courses on renewable energy system installation and maintenance (e.g., solar panels, wind turbines).	2026/27
	• Offer training in Geographic Information Systems (GIS), remote sensing, and emerging technologies to support forest and land management.	2026/27

Action	Theme	Timeframe
	• Encourage further development in wildlife management and sustainable forestry practices.	2025/26
	• Provide training pathways in advanced manufacturing, engineering, and marine industries, focusing on skills in shipbuilding, marine engineering, and production of marine equipment.	2026/27
	• Develop career progression training and work-based learning opportunities to ensure resilience in the retail sector.	2025/26
	• Create pathways for career advancement in retail management and sales.	2026/27
	Theme 3: Lifelong Learning and Upskilling	
Actions	• Increase access to adult education programmes, including literacy and numeracy, vocational qualifications, and life skills courses to support career progression and adaptability.	2025/26
	• Ensure access to courses on digital literacy, programming, and advanced IT skills to prepare the workforce for digital roles in the tech-driven economy. Offer certifications in areas such as cybersecurity, data analysis, and cloud computing.	2025/26
	• Develop short, flexible training courses	2025/26
	• Increase the number, awareness and accessibility of local apprenticeships	2025/27
	Theme 4: Collaboration and Community Engagement	
Actions	• Strengthen collaboration and alignment around skills between local employers, schools, colleges, training providers, local authorities, businesses, and community organisations to shape curriculum, offer placements, and influence strategic skills planning.	2026-27
	• Engage the community to assess skills gaps and identify training opportunities, ensuring the workforce meets the specific needs of local businesses. Encourage consultation through town halls, surveys, and community meetings.	2025
	Theme 5: Inclusive Growth	
	• Develop targeted initiatives for individuals facing barriers to employment, including NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), the 50+, people living with disabilities, and ethnic minorities.	2026/27
	• Promote gender equality by ensuring women have equal access to training programmes and resources that lead to career and self-employment opportunities. Develop mentorship programmes for women in male-dominated sectors.	2025/26
	• Advocate for improved transport accessibility of students and apprentices to training and employment	2025/27

Action	Theme	Timeframe
	Theme 6: Business and Entrepreneurship	
Actions	• Promote entrepreneurial activity in the New Forest by providing access to financial support, grants, and resources for starting a business.	2026/27
	• Develop networking opportunities and business incubators, particularly for excluded groups (young people, women, NEETs, and career changers).	2025/26
	• Offer courses in business planning, financial management, and marketing to equip local entrepreneurs with the skills to grow and manage their businesses.	2026/27
	• Create programmes focused on leadership development, team management, and effective communication to build stronger local leaders and improve business management.	2026/27
	• Mitigation and support for businesses who may lose people as part of the upskilling and reskilling.	2029+
	Theme 7: Monitoring and Evaluation	
	• Establish clear metrics and indicators	2025/26
	• Set up a system for collecting quantitative and qualitative data regularly from skills group partners to monitor programmes performance.	2025
	• Conduct periodic evaluations	Every 3 years
	• Engage stakeholders in the evaluation process	2026/27
	• Use technology for real-time monitoring	2027/27
	• Assess long-term impact	Every 5 years
	• Continuous improvement and adaptation	2026/27
	• Develop an annual report detailing the achievements, challenges, and lessons learned from the monitoring and evaluation process	Yearly

3.4 Priority Groups

Reflecting the key objective of this Council to support inclusive growth across the New Forest, there is a need for a particular focus on priority target groups to tackle inequalities in access to skills and employment. Five key priority target groups are identified which are:

- Supporting women to enter or re-enter the workforce
- Young people, particularly those not in education, employment or training (NEETs)
- Supporting people aged 50+ to re-enter or remain in the workforce
- Supporting job changers to reskill and upskill to meet emerging skills needs
- Support self-employment in the New Forest

Appendix One provides details of how the priority actions identified will help to address these target groups.

4 Delivering the Plan

4.1 Funding the Plan

In the New Forest, skills development is supported through various funding initiatives aimed at enhancing workforce capabilities and supporting local businesses. Key funding sources include the Apprenticeship Levy (soon to become the Flexible Growth and Skills Levy), Adult Skills Fund (AEB Skills Bootcamps), UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), the New Forest Apprenticeship and Skills Hub, Local Skills Improvement Plans and Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF), Further Education and Higher Education funding and community and charitable grants. The Council will continue to advocate for funding incentives for training providers and employers offering skills development in priority sectors.

The Solent Freeport is poised to significantly enhance skills development in the region through several targeted initiatives. The Solent Freeport allows local authorities to retain 100% of business rates growth generated within the Freeport's designated tax sites (Southampton Water, Navigator Quarter, and Dunsbury Park). These additional revenues are ring-fenced for reinvestment into the Freeport area, supporting skills development, infrastructure, innovation, and business growth. The Solent Freeport Governing Body oversees the allocation of retained business rates[1]. Local councils within the Freeport (including NFDC) will collaborate to decide how best to deploy these funds.

All opportunities must be mapped against the agreed actions in the NFSAP and further investigated, with specific proposals developed to secure the necessary resources. Successful delivery of the NFSAP will require targeted investment (both capital and revenue) to implement the actions – a lack of discrete funding to deliver the NFSAP will hinder progress of the Plan objectives and outcomes.

4.2 Implementation and Governance

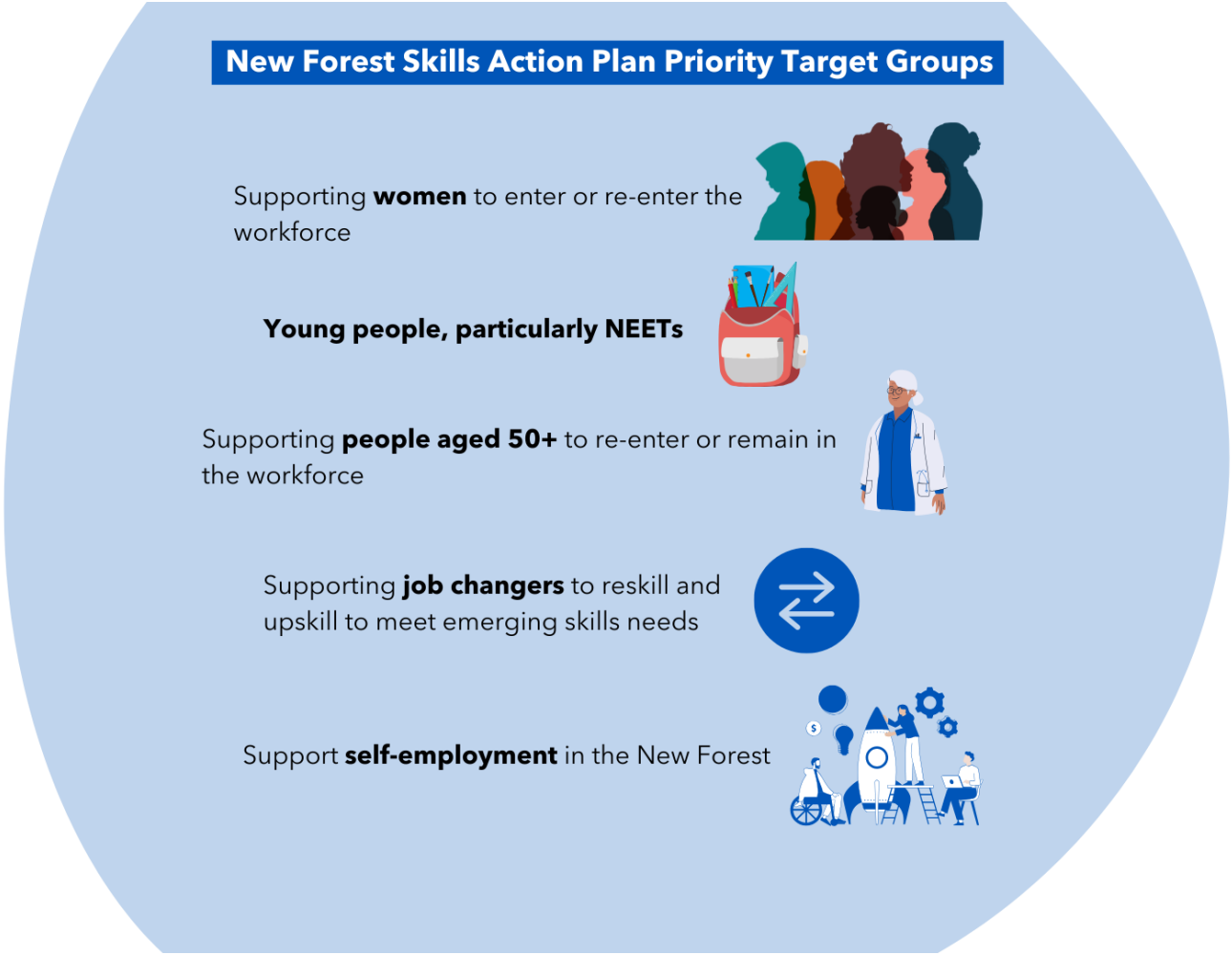
While the NFDC have led the development of the NFSAP, its successful implementation is dependent on the input of wider partners. The ownership of the NFSAP must be shared by all the key regional stakeholders, led in partnership by a proposed New Forest Skills Group, under the direction of the NFDC. For the NFSAP to achieve its goals, it must be seen as a shared responsibility. In addition to the New Forest Skills Group, the regional skills groups will have a critical role to play in ensuring the actions of the NFSAP are delivered.

[1] Solent Freeport Retained Rates Investment Committee, Draft Terms of Reference, March 2022

Appendix One

Actions to support priority target groups

By targeting priority groups, the NFSAP will support its strategic objective of delivering inclusive growth. The following pages set out the objectives, rational and priority group specific actions.



Appendix One

Young People, particularly NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training)

Objective

Reduce the percentage of young people aged 16–18 who are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) in the New Forest.

Rationale

Since 2020, the percentage of Year 11 Leavers who are NEET has been increasing in the New Forest. This rise highlights the need for targeted interventions to support young people in the area.

Importance of supporting NEETs

Economic Benefits

- Increased Productivity: Engaging NEETs in education or employment boosts their productivity, contributing to the overall economy
- Reduced Public Spending: Supporting NEETs can reduce the long-term costs associated with unemployment benefits, healthcare, and social services

Social Inclusion

- Preventing Marginalisation: Providing opportunities for NEETs helps prevent social exclusion and marginalisation, fostering a more inclusive place to live and work
- Building Community: Engaging NEETs in community activities and programmes strengthens social cohesion and community relationships

Personal Development

- Skill Development: Education and training programmes help NEETs develop valuable skills, increasing their employability and career prospects
- Improved Well-being: Being engaged in productive activities can enhance mental health and overall well-being, reducing feelings of isolation and depression

Breaking the Cycle

- Intergenerational Impact: Helping NEETs can break the cycle of poverty and unemployment, providing better opportunities for future generations
- Positive Role Models: Successful integration of NEETs into education or employment can inspire others in similar situations to seek opportunities

Addressing Skills Shortages

- Meeting Labour Market Needs: Engaging NEETs in training programs can help address local skills shortages, ensuring that businesses have access to a skilled workforce.

Appendix One

Young People, particularly NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training)

Skills and Training Actions

Mentorship Programmes

- Create mentorship opportunities between local businesses, community leaders, and young people and NEETs to provide guidance, motivation, and pathways into training or employment.

Youth Employment Initiatives

- Develop targeted programmes that combine work experience with formal training in high-demand sectors (e.g., renewable energy, health and social care, visitor economy).

Partnerships with Employers

- Build partnerships with local employers to offer apprenticeships, internships, and work-based learning specifically designed for young people and NEETs.

Engagement with Schools and Colleges

- Strengthen collaboration between schools, colleges, and training providers to ensure a seamless transition for young people into education, apprenticeships, or direct employment.

Skills and Personal Development Workshops

- Offer workshops focusing on soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and time management, to improve employability and increase confidence.

Identifying Young People who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET

- Working with schools/colleges and voluntary/third sector to identify young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET to target support.

Effective Careers Information, Advice and Guidance

- Develop targeted outreach programmes in partnership with local schools, colleges, community groups, and employment support services to reach underrepresented groups, including young people and NEETs
- Embed careers advice within community settings (e.g. libraries, community centres, and job clubs) to improve accessibility for individuals who may not engage with traditional services
- Host regular careers fairs and skills events with a focus on inclusive participation, featuring local employers from key and emerging sectors (e.g. health and social care, hospitality & tourism, and emerging opportunities in renewables, decarbonisation, engineering etc).
- Work with employers to co-design career pathways that offer real opportunities for progression, especially for part-time, low-wage, and entry-level work

Appendix One

Supporting women in the New Forest to enter or re-enter the workforce

Objective

Empower women in the New Forest to access training, increase their employability, and close the gender pay gap.

Rationale

There is a significant Gender Pay Gap in the New Forest and women are under employed. Addressing the gender pay gap remains a priority to ensure equal pay for equal work. There is a need to address career progression for women and address the gender balance of occupations by opening up opportunities especially in roles that are traditionally male sectors.

Importance of supporting women enter or re-enter the workforce

Economic Benefits

- Increased Productivity: Women bring diverse skills and perspectives, enhancing productivity and innovation in the workplace
- Boosting GDP: Higher female participation in the workforce can significantly boost the overall economy.

Tackle Inequality

- Gender Equality: Supporting women in the workforce promotes gender equality, ensuring that everyone has equal opportunities to succeed.
- Reducing Poverty: Employment can help lift women and their families out of poverty, improving their quality of life.

Personal Development

- Skill Utilisation: Women can utilise and develop their skills, leading to personal growth and career satisfaction.
- Confidence and Independence: Employment fosters confidence and financial independence, empowering women to make informed life choices.

Postive Role Models

- Inspiring Future Generations: Women in the workforce serve as role models, inspiring future generations to pursue their career aspirations.
- Breaking Stereotypes: Successful women in diverse roles help break down gender stereotypes and promote a more inclusive society.

Addressing Skills Shortages

- Diverse Talent Pool: Tapping into the female workforce will help to address skills shortages in the New Forest, ensuring businesses have access to a wider talent pool.

Appendix One

Supporting women in the New Forest to enter or re-enter the workforce

Skills and Training Actions

Flexible Training Programmes:

- Develop training modules with flexible schedules (e.g., evening or weekend classes) tailored to women who may have caregiving responsibilities.

Digital Upskilling and Literacy Courses:

- Offer digital skills training to equip women with the technological proficiency needed to thrive in modern workplaces, especially in tech and administrative roles.

Women's Leadership and Career Progression Courses:

- Provide leadership development Programmes and career progression workshops that focus on empowering women to assume senior roles or entrepreneurial ventures.

Targeted Outreach and Support Services:

- Offer mentoring, counselling, and confidence-building services specifically aimed at women who are entering or re-entering the workforce (for example, after a career break).

Networking, Peer Support and Mentoring Groups:

- Facilitate networking opportunities and peer support groups for women in various sectors, especially in male-dominated industries like construction, engineering, and manufacturing. This could include mentoring programme led by local female professionals.

Effective Careers Information, Advice and Guidance:

- Develop targeted outreach programmes in partnership with local colleges, community groups, and employment support services to reach underrepresented groups, including women.
- Embed careers advice within community settings (e.g. libraries, community centres, and job clubs) to improve accessibility for individuals who may not engage with traditional services
- Host regular careers fairs and skills events with a focus on inclusive participation, featuring local employers from key and emerging sectors (e.g. health and social care, hospitality & tourism, and emerging opportunities in renewables, decarbonisation, engineering etc).
- Work with employers to co-design career pathways that offer real opportunities for progression, especially for part-time, low-wage, and entry-level work

Appendix One

Support people aged 50+ to re-enter or remain in the workforce

Objective

Provide reskilling and upskilling opportunities for older workers (aged 50 and above) to address skills shortages and promote lifelong learning.

Rationale

Workers aged 50+ bring valuable experience and knowledge to the workforce, which can be beneficial for mentoring and training younger employees. As they make up a significant proportion of the population in the New Forest, opportunities for reskilling and upskilling should be created to address skills shortages. Supporting and valuing workers aged 50+ can lead to a more dynamic, experienced, and resilient workforce.

Importance of supporting people aged 50+ to re-enter or remain in the workforce

Experience and Skills

- Depth of Knowledge: Older workers bring a wealth of experience and critical thinking skills that are invaluable in many industries.
- Technical Proficiency: In fields requiring extensive training, such as engineering or craftsmanship (boatbuilding, chefs), older workers often possess technical skills that take years to develop.

Mentorship and Knowledge Transfer

- Mentoring Younger Employees: Older workers can mentor younger employees, sharing their knowledge and expertise, which helps in skill development and succession planning.
- Retaining Institutional Knowledge: They help retain valuable institutional knowledge and networks within the organisation.

Diverse Perspectives

- Multigenerational Teams: Older workers contribute to diverse, multigenerational teams, which can enhance creativity and problem-solving.
- Balanced Decision-Making: Their experience often leads to more balanced and informed decision-making processes.

Adaptability and Learning

- Overcoming Technology Gaps: Many older workers are willing to learn and adapt to new technologies, proving that the perceived technology gap can be bridged.
- Continuous Learning: They often engage in lifelong learning, staying updated with industry trends and developments.

Economic and Social Benefits

- Economic Contribution: By staying in the workforce longer, older workers contribute to the economy and can help mitigate skills shortages.
- Social Inclusion: Their participation in the workforce promotes social inclusion and reduces the risk of isolation.

Appendix One

Support people aged 50+ to re-enter or remain in the workforce

Skills and Training Actions

Technology Training:

- Offer training on digital tools, online platforms, and modern technologies to help older workers bridge the digital divide and remain competitive in the job market.

Lifelong Learning Programmes:

- Establish ongoing educational opportunities for older workers to stay updated on industry developments, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, retail, and renewable energy.

Flexible Work Models and Part-time Opportunities:

- Collaborate with employers to design roles that cater to older workers, including part-time or flexible hours to accommodate diverse needs.

Skills Transfer Workshops:

- Facilitate workshops where older workers can learn how to transfer their knowledge to younger generations, fostering intergenerational learning and mentorship.

Health and Wellbeing Training:

- Provide wellness and resilience training for older workers to ensure they are physically and mentally prepared for the demands of their roles.

Effective Careers Information, Advice and Guidance:

- Develop targeted outreach programmes in partnership with local colleges, community groups, and employment support services to reach underrepresented groups, including people aged 50+.
- Embed careers advice within community settings (e.g. libraries, community centres, and job clubs) to improve accessibility for individuals who may not engage with traditional services.
- Host regular careers fairs and skills events with a focus on inclusive participation, featuring local employers from key and emerging sectors (e.g. health and social care, hospitality & tourism, and emerging opportunities in renewables, decarbonisation, engineering etc).
- Work with employers to co-design career pathways that offer real opportunities for progression, especially for part-time and low-wage work.

Appendix One

Support for job changers to reskill and upskill to meet emerging skills needs

Objective

Enable job changers to develop new skills and meet emerging demands in the New Forest economy.

Rationale

Job changers will play a vital role in the New Forest's economy as forecast skills shortages and skills gaps increase due to changing demographics, ageing populations and the growth of automation and new technology.

Importance of supporting job changers

Economic Benefits

- Reskilling helps fill critical skill gaps, enabling businesses to operate more efficiently and innovate. This, in turn, drives economic growth by increasing productivity and competitiveness

Addressing Skills Gaps

- Filling Talent Gaps: Instead of recruiting new employees, which can be costly and time-consuming, businesses can reskill their existing workforce to fill critical skill gaps. This approach is often more efficient and helps retain valuable employee
- Filling Vacancies: Job changers can fill critical vacancies in sectors experiencing skills shortages, ensuring that local businesses have the talent they need to thrive.
- Up-to-Date Skills: They often bring new skills and perspectives from their previous roles, which can be particularly valuable in rapidly evolving industries.

Innovation and Fresh Perspectives

- New Ideas: Job changers introduce fresh ideas and innovative approaches, which can drive business growth and development.
- Problem-Solving: Their diverse experiences enable them to approach problems from different angles, leading to more effective solutions.
- Workforce Adaptability: As businesses in the New Forest evolve due to technological advancements, reskilling ensures that the workforce can adapt to new demands. This adaptability is crucial for maintaining employment levels and reducing the risk of job displacement.

Appendix One

Support for job changers to reskill and upskill to meet emerging skills needs

Skills and Training Actions

Cross-Sector Reskilling Programmes:

- Develop short-term reskilling Programmes (for examplel, Skills Bootcamps) for individuals from declining industries (e.g., traditional manufacturing) to transition into growing sectors such as green energy, tech, and healthcare.

Online and Blended Learning Options:

- Provide online courses and blended learning pathways to ensure job changers can access education while balancing current employment or life commitments.

Sector-Specific Training Partnerships:

- Collaborate with businesses to design sector-specific training courses that address the unique skills needed in industries like advanced manufacturing, conservation, and marine engineering.

Job Placement and Internship Programmes:

- Establish job placement initiatives where job changers can gain hands-on experience in emerging sectors to boost their employability.

Personalised Career Counselling:

- Offer one-on-one career counselling and skills assessment sessions to help job changers identify transferable skills and design a personalised reskilling plan.

Effective Careers Information, Advice and Guidance:

- Develop targeted outreach programmes in partnership with local colleges, community groups, and employment support services to reach underrepresented groups.
- Embed careers advice within community settings (e.g. libraries, community centres, and job clubs) to improve accessibility for individuals who may not engage with traditional services.
- Host regular careers fairs and skills events with a focus on inclusive participation, featuring local employers from key and emerging sectors (e.g. health and social care, hospitality & tourism, and emerging opportunities in renewables, decarbonisation, engineering etc).
- Work with employers to co-design career pathways that offer real opportunities for progression, especially for part-time and low-wage work.

Appendix One

Support for Self-Employment in the New Forest

Objective

Provide resources and training to empower individuals to pursue and succeed in self-employment, fostering local entrepreneurship.

Rationale

New Forest has a relatively large proportion of self-employment (11.5% compared to 10.6% at Hampshire level) who contribute to the local economy through various small businesses and entrepreneurial activities. However, over the last decade the level of self-employment has been steadily declining at a faster rate than Hampshire. By supporting self-employment, the New Forest can enhance their economic resilience, foster innovation, and improve the quality of life for their residents.

Importance of supporting self-employment opportunities

Economic Benefits

- Job Creation: Self-employed individuals often create jobs for themselves and others, boosting local employment.
- Economic Diversification: It helps diversify the local economy, reducing reliance on a few large employers.

Community Engagement

- Local Investment: Self-employed individuals are more likely to invest in their local communities, supporting other local businesses and contributing to community development.

Innovation and Entrepreneurship

- Innovation: Self-employment encourages innovation and entrepreneurship, leading to the development of new products, services, and business models.
- Skill Development: It provides opportunities for individuals to develop a wide range of skills, from business management to technical expertise.

Quality of Life

- Work-Life Balance: Self-employment can offer greater flexibility, allowing individuals to achieve a better work-life balance.
- Attracting Residents: It can attract new residents to rural areas, including those seeking a lifestyle change or remote work opportunities.

Digital Connectivity

- Remote Work: Advances in digital connectivity have made it easier for self-employed individuals to operate businesses from rural locations, expanding their market reach.
- Shared Workspaces: The development of shared spaces in rural areas supports self-employed individuals by providing access to resources and networking opportunities.

Appendix One

Support for Self-Employment in the New Forest

Skills and Training Actions

Entrepreneurship Training:

- Offer comprehensive training Programmes on business start-up, financial management, marketing, and business growth strategies for aspiring self-employed individuals.

Mentorship for Entrepreneurs:

- Establish a mentorship program linking new entrepreneurs with experienced business owners who can offer guidance, advice, and support in the early stages of business development.

Access to Resources and Grants:

- Provide information on available grants, financial support, and business development resources tailored to self-employed individuals in the New Forest.

Networking and Business Support Groups:

- Create opportunities for self-employed individuals to meet and collaborate with others in their industry, including through local business hubs or coworking spaces.

Digital Marketing and Online Business Training:

- Equip self-employed individuals with essential digital skills, including social media marketing, e-commerce, and website development, to help them scale their businesses and reach wider audiences.

Access to Shared Workspaces:

- Develop or promote co-working spaces in rural areas that support self-employed individuals by providing office resources, technology, and collaborative environments to foster innovation and growth.

Effective Careers Information, Advice and Guidance:

- Develop targeted outreach programmes in partnership with local colleges, community groups, and employment support services to reach underrepresented groups.
- Embed careers advice within community settings (e.g. libraries, community centres, and job clubs) to improve accessibility for individuals who may not engage with traditional services.