



Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Economic Bulletin

Issue 40 – December 2023

Welcome to the latest edition of the Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Economic Bulletin produced by our Economy, Skills, and Insight Teams, which provides the timeliest analysis of official Government data, national intelligence, and local insights on the state of the local economy.

Alongside information on the Claimant Count and Job Vacancies that will be a part of every Bulletin, this month's issue also provides more detailed youth claimant count analysis and updated ward level analysis of the claimant count to help identify areas which are being impacted the hardest by unemployment and a reliance on work-related benefits across Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent and where there may be a greater need for support. We also provide analysis of the latest business insolvency data to further understand how businesses are faring during the current economic climate.

We hope you find the Bulletin useful and welcome your comments and suggestions on further information you would like to see included in future editions to make sure that it continues to meet your needs. If you do have any feedback please send your comments to Darren Farmer, Economy & Skills Analyst at darren.farmer@staffordshire.gov.uk.

Stay Safe,
Darryl Eyers
Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills, Staffordshire County Council



Key Messages

Local Picture

- In Staffordshire having seen **improvement in the local economy and labour market following the COVID pandemic**, we have seen unemployment, youth unemployment and dependency on work-related benefits increase during the energy and cost-of-living crisis. This is reflected in this month's **further increase in the Claimant Count. Although it is positive that there continues to be a high number of job vacancies available for those that unfortunately find themselves out of work. We will continue to support our residents into work and ensure that Staffordshire has the strong workforce it needs to grow the economy.**
- We also continue to support **local businesses that face ongoing challenging conditions** due to a wide range of factors including **high interest rates and energy prices, increased commodity costs, increasing wage levels and lower consumer demand.**
- Looking at the local data in more detail, following long-term declines in the **claimant count** approaching pre-pandemic levels, the number of work-related benefit claimants in Staffordshire **increased by 340 this month to a total of 15,030 claimants.** This was a higher proportional increase this month of 2.3% than seen nationally (2.0%) or regionally (1.4%).
- **The claimant rate for Staffordshire remained unchanged at 2.8%** of the working age population. Staffordshire remains one of the lowest rates in the West Midlands, far lower than the average for the region of 4.9% and lower than the average for England at 3.8%, both of which saw increases from 4.8% and 3.7% respectively.
- This month has seen an **increase of 60 claimants in the youth claimant count in Staffordshire with a total of 2,915 young people.** The proportion of young people in Staffordshire aged 18-24 that are claiming work-related Universal Credit increased from 4.6% to 4.7% this month. This is however lower than the national rate of 5.1% and far lower than the regional rate of 6.9%, both of which saw increases this month from 5.0% and 6.7% respectively.
- Whilst there has been an increase this month in the overall claimant count and youth claimant count, **Staffordshire still has one of the lowest claimant rates in the region.** Youth claimants will remain a priority for further support that is already in place to help people that unfortunately find themselves unemployed to move into the high number of job vacancies that are present across Staffordshire.
- **Demand for labour remains high with the number of vacancies still above pre-pandemic levels and there is currently estimated to be around 1 job vacancy available for every claimant within the county.** Therefore, our focus continues to be to support those that unfortunately find themselves unemployed, to transition into work.
- **The total number of Universal Credit (UC) claimants in Staffordshire is 25% or 2,980 higher than the level seen in March 2020 (pre-COVID),** which is largely in-

line with the 27% increase seen nationally and 24% seen regionally.

- It is also important to recognise that although claimant numbers are higher than pre-pandemic levels, given our strong position going into the pandemic, Staffordshire still performs comparatively well given **Staffordshire's claimant rate is 2.8% of the working age population compared to 4.9% regionally and 3.8% nationally.**
- In terms of job vacancies, **Staffordshire saw a 10% increase in the number of available job vacancies between October and November to a total of 17,300 which continues to remain higher than the number of work-related benefit claimants. Stoke-on-Trent saw a 12% increase in vacancies to a total of 7,200 which is lower than the number of claimants this month. Across the region in the last month there was a 9% increase, and nationally there was a 7% increase in job vacancies. Therefore, Staffordshire saw a higher proportional increase this month than both regional and national levels.**
- There has been a recent declining trend from July this year indicating a slowing down in the jobs market as a result of some business sectors being more cautious about recruitment due to the uncertainty in the economy. **Overall, though the outlook is positive and recruitment demand remains strong with new job postings higher than pre-pandemic levels with Staffordshire job vacancies 46% higher than pre-pandemic levels and Stoke-on-Trent 32% higher.**
- Considering the **top 20 job vacancy occupations in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire**, demand for roles in social care continue to remain high with **'Care Workers and Home Carers'** being the highest in demand occupations.
- The following occupations **'Sales Related,' 'Cleaners & Domestic,' and 'Warehouse Operatives'** occupations also have strong demand.
- In the Education sector there is particularly high demand for **'Teaching Assistants,' 'Secondary Education Teaching Professionals.'**
- There is **strong demand for 'Bookkeepers, Payroll Managers and Wages Clerks,' 'Administrative,' 'Customer Service,' 'Chartered and Certified Accountants,'** across business sectors to support business in their recovery, survival, and new methods of working.
- In the Hospitality sector, **'Kitchen and Catering Assistants'** remain the roles most in demand.
- There is high demand in the Health and Social Care sector for **'Social Workers,' 'Registered Nursing Professionals.'**
- Demand for **'Managers & Directors in Retail & Wholesale,' 'Sales and Retail Assistants'** in the Retail and Wholesale sector also remain strong.
- In the Manufacturing sector **'Mechanical Engineers,' 'Plant & Machine Operatives,'** are most in demand.
- The Logistics sector continues to have high demand for **'Large Goods Vehicle Drivers.'**
- In the Motor Trade **'Vehicle Technicians, Mechanics and Electricians'** are in demand.

- In ICT demand for **'Programmers & Software Development Professionals'** is high.
- It is in these areas of the economy where job vacancies remain particularly high and where we are hearing the most reports of **labour and skills shortages** with a mismatch of workers or skills to fill the vacant jobs.
- This has the **potential to slow down economic growth and limit business survival unless the labour shortage and skills gap is quickly and effectively addressed**. Clearly employment support organisations, skills providers and the Government's Plan for Jobs including the Restart schemes and new Skills Bootcamps have a vital role in upskilling and reskilling jobseekers into areas of demand and preventing them becoming long-term unemployed. Government and business sectors have a key role in ensuring that jobs in areas of demand are attracting workers with good pay and terms and conditions to help prevent labour shortages.
- It is clear there continues to be a high number of jobs available in the local economy and the need now is to ensure that there is a strong local labour pool with skilled workers able to fill these roles to support business recovery/survival and improve prosperity through better pay. The national and local support which is in place to support those that have been unfortunate enough to lose their jobs is vital in both **reskilling and upskilling** as well as enabling potential applicants to access the opportunities available. Encouraging those that have become **economically inactive** due to COVID will further help to address labour shortages and skills gaps.
- **Staffordshire County Council's dedicated Job Brokerage Service** is designed to do exactly this by matching local people, employers, and training providers to fill jobs and provide people with the jobs and careers they need.
- There are clear **emerging opportunities for job creation in digital (including online retail and e-commerce) and the green economy (including retrofitting homes to improve energy efficiency, electric cars e.g., Jaguar Land Rover, and hydrogen e.g., JCB)**.
- We will also look to build on our existing strengths including **engineering and advanced manufacturing** through the adoption of AI, Automation and Machine Learning, **construction** to achieve Government house building targets and build major new infrastructure projects such as the West Midlands Freight Interchange which will create 8,500 new jobs. Also **advanced logistics** with ecommerce creating continued demand and the recent announcement by Pets At Home in Stafford creating over 750 new jobs.

Local Initiatives

- We are continuing to prioritise support for businesses and people whose jobs or employment prospects have been impacted by the pandemic and aid the recovery, as well as putting in place the support needed locally during the cost-of-living and energy crisis.
- Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent businesses that have been turned down by other lenders can now apply to the **Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Business Loan Fund**, supporting businesses to grow through affordable, unsecured loans from £10,000 to £50,000. To find out more visit [here](#).
- The **Staffordshire Means Back to Business Scheme**, a unique partnership between the county council and the county's district and borough councils to support businesses through the pandemic and into recovery. The programme is a package of schemes including backing for start-ups, financial support so businesses can thrive, carbon literacy, apprenticeship support and training. The programme was allocated £737,000 from UKCRF.
- The **Get Started and Grow scheme** has been extended which provides fully funded support for 0- to 5-year-old businesses. Businesses have already saved thousands by getting accountancy, business planning, website and branding professionally sorted completely free of charge. Now everyone, from those just thinking about setting up a side-business to those who have got past the tricky first few years can get the support that they need. It's all in response to what you've said is most important for your business growth. [To apply for fully funded SME support](#).
- Businesses in Staffordshire are able to benefit from a new free recruitment service which will help to match their employment vacancies with appropriate potential candidates. The **Staffordshire Jobs and Careers Service**, provides advice and support to both businesses and people looking for employment opportunities. It will match vacancies with candidates looking for jobs in certain sectors and with appropriate skills. The service is working with a range of partner organisations and a team of specialist brokers will advise employers and potential employees with options available to them. [Find out more about Staffordshire Jobs and Careers](#).
- **Need some support? Contact the Growth Hub** - The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub is your first port of call for any business-support related enquiry. It acts as the focal point for businesses that wish to grow by referring them to co-ordinated and cohesive growth programmes, business networks, growth groups and links to specialist information, advice, and services. If you would like a free of charge appointment with a qualified Growth Hub Business Advisor to discuss what options are available to support the growth of your business, please contact them on 0300 111 8002.
- **Help To Grow: Management programme** is 90% funded by the government so you only pay £750. Delivered in partnership with Small Business Charter, courses are running at leading business schools across the UK. This programme includes:
 - access 12-weeks of learning designed to fit alongside work commitments

- develop a bespoke business growth plan to help your business reach its full potential
- get 1:1 support from a business mentor
- learn from peers and network with businesses just like yours

To find out more [visit](#).

- The **Staffordshire Business and Enterprise Network (SBEN)** has introduced more support for businesses in Staffordshire. [The Low Carbon Business Evolution Programme](#) can help you to reduce your carbon footprint and increase energy efficiency. It has now been widened to include an additional Energy Efficiency Review for a business that has previously had one, and grants towards the capital costs for solar projects. Membership of SBEN is still free until the end of next March. Membership includes access to the Carbon Tracker tool. **[Why join SBEN?](#)**
- **Save up to 15% off your energy costs.** Sub-metering monitoring systems are a cost-effective way for Staffordshire businesses to manage and reduce their energy use. Sub-metering monitoring use a combination of hardware and software to collect and analyse data about energy performance. SBEN (Staffordshire Business Environment Network), through Staffordshire County Council, is providing businesses with a sub-metering monitoring grant of up to £5000 (50% match funded) to get everything set up. [Find out more and apply](#)
- **Staffordshire targets gigabit connectivity for residents and businesses** - A drive to connect Staffordshire residents and businesses to gigabit technology over the next eight years will be coordinated by the county council. Working with broadband and mobile providers, developers and national government, the county council will be aiming to ensure the vast majority of properties can access gigabit speeds by 2030. As part of the government's Levelling Up agenda, Project Gigabit aims to reach those premises in the county that are not considered commercially viable. The new Gigafast Staffordshire team (renamed from the Superfast Staffordshire team) will take a leadership role in the county to deliver the programme locally. The county council will also be working with government on its Shared Rural Network programme to boost 4G mobile connectivity. This could see coverage in Staffordshire increase from its current 78 per cent to 92 per cent. As well as improving everyday life, the move to gigabit technology could boost the local by hundreds of millions of pounds, and also supports the county council's climate change commitments - with smart technology reducing energy consumption and cutting carbon emissions. The county council launched the Community Fibre Partnership support fund for communities which could not be reached by the main programme which helped nine communities to benefit, with a further 24 communities benefitting from the Gigabit Broadband Top-up Voucher scheme. The new Gigafast Staffordshire website has launched to help everyone understand the benefits of gigabit connectivity at www.gigafaststaffordshire.co.uk.
- **Staffordshire County Council** is also supporting our residents and businesses through the **[Here to Help - cost of living support programme](#)**. This website

signposts to a range of support that is already available to people.

- The Government has launched the **Skills for Life** campaign which highlights the range of training and employment schemes available for businesses wanting to boost their workforce capabilities, including apprenticeships, traineeships, and T-Levels. The Government's [Skills for Life](#) website showcases hundreds of government-funded skills opportunities. It promotes online learning options and free essential skills courses, such as numeracy, English and digital, sector specific qualifications, Skills Bootcamps, Free Courses for Jobs, and in-work training, as well as personalised support and guidance from the National Careers Service. Refreshed [campaign toolkits](#) for the skills campaigns currently running for employers, adults and young people are available to share via your networks and channels, with your own audiences, staff and customers to help extend the reach of the campaigns to those people who will benefit most. [Find out more](#).
- **New employer information and advice service - Support with Employee Health and Disability:** A digital information and advice service for businesses is live on [GOV.UK](#), providing tailored guidance on health and disability, to prevent avoidable job loss and help people thrive at work. Employers and disability organisations have been involved in the design and testing of the service which will continue to be developed throughout 2022/23. Current features include:
 - Helping employers to feel more confident having conversations about health and disability.
 - Encouraging early intervention and sustained support.
 - Signposting to trusted expert support and resources.
 - Helping employers understand their legal responsibilities.

Please use the [feedback link](#) as your thoughts on how the content and design are shaped really will make a difference. [Read the press release](#)

- **Stoke-On-Trent & Staffordshire Growth Hub have partnered with the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) to offer free 1-2-1 virtual business support sessions.** Are you looking to start a business or in the embryonic stages of growth? Are you:

- keen to identify potential new markets?
- interested in bidding for public procurement opportunities?
- in need of advice on chasing late payments?
- seeking general advice and support?

Through one of these invaluable 1-2-1 sessions, you can:

- get in touch with international trade specialists
- find sources of local authority support
- learn key steps in starting a business and get assistance with many more issues/challenges your business faces

If you feel you might benefit from one of these virtual sessions, please email karen.woolley@fsb.org.uk to book a slot. This offer is open to FSB members and non-members.

- **Do you know what your employees need to be their most productive?**

Any business' most valuable asset is its people, and with adults spending most of their time at work, businesses need to know how to best support their health and wellbeing. The **Staffordshire County Council Workplace Health Service**, working with public health and local health experts, offers businesses a comprehensive and funded package of online and in-person support, including:

- mental health and wellbeing
- smoking cessation
- healthy activity and healthy eating in the workplace, and more.

But where do you start?

- 1) [Check out the business wellbeing support available online](#)
- 2) [Join the Healthy Workplace Newsletter](#)
- 3) [Check out the Everyone Health offer - in-business support](#)
- 4) [Consider starting the Thrive at Work Workplace Wellbeing Award Programme.](#)

CHECK OUT HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS

- Businesses across Staffordshire have the opportunity to build confidence and skill-up their staff for free with the government's **Multiply scheme**. Multiply is a programme that helps employees build confidence and lifelong numeracy skills through bitesize courses, bespoke help for businesses and functional maths qualifications. In a recent poll, over 60% of businesses in Staffordshire say that they need more functional maths capacity in their workforce, for increased performance, personal and professional confidence, and team motivation, alongside career progression.

Eligibility:

- Staffordshire based business.
- Adults aged 19 plus.
- Individuals that have not achieved a Level 2 maths qualification, i.e., GCSE of at least a Grade C or equivalent.
- Individuals who may want to develop numeracy skills for work or progression.
- Individuals that want to brush up and develop their numeracy skills for everyday life and work.

Contact Multiply@staffordshire.gov.uk to explore your options.

- **The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub is working in partnership with creative marketing agency, Nuddy Media, to deliver 'Practical Marketing,' a step-by-step course to help local businesses create a Marketing Strategy.** This will provide an overview of Marketing and cover the following:
 - Session 1 - 25 October: Introduction to Marketing and Customer Profiling
 - Session 2 - 15 November: Branding & Understanding the Marketing Instruments
 - Session 3 - 13 December: Promotions, Incentives and Loyalty Schemes
 - Session 4 - January 2024: Creating A Marketing Strategy
 - Session 5 - February 2024: The Marketing Calendar & Marketing Plan
 - Session 6 - March 2024: Implementing your Plan and working with Suppliers

Each session will provide standalone knowledge which can be applied to your business, but the benefit will be maximised if you attend all 6. Interested businesses can currently book onto the first 3 sessions.

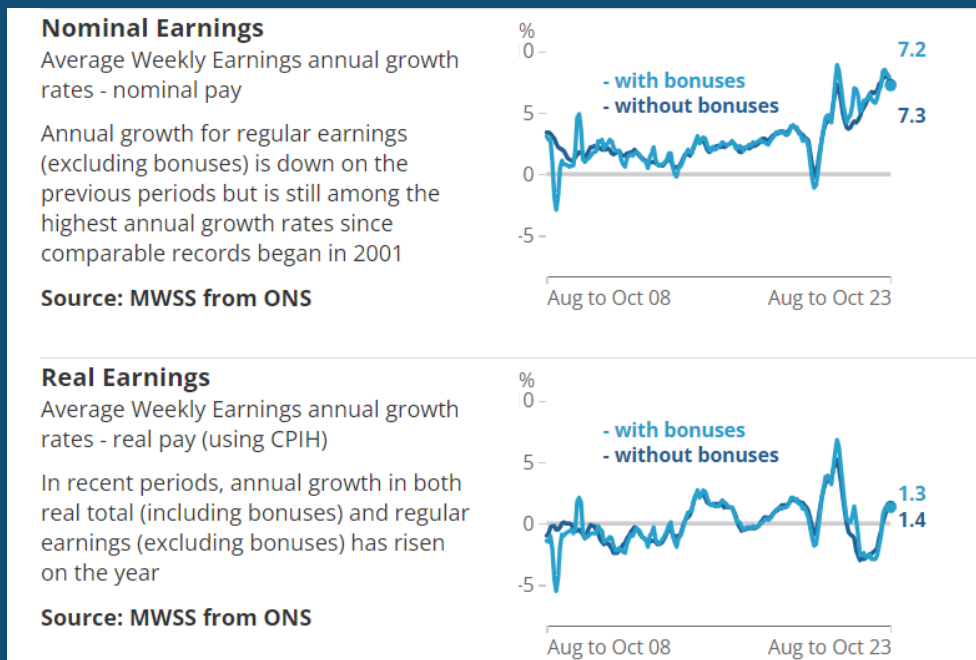
[BOOK YOUR FREE PLACE](#)

National Context

- This month we have heard that the UK economy shrank by more than expected in October, as higher interest rates and bad weather held back growth. While household spending continues to be squeezed by inflation and the cost-of-living crisis.
- As we close out 2023 and move towards 2024 we would like to wish everyone a happy Christmas and we hope for a prosperous New Year!

Cost of Living

- **The rate of price rises significantly slowed again in November to another two-year low. Inflation stood at 3.9 per cent last month**, according to the Office for National Statistics, a significant fall from the 4.6 per cent recorded a month earlier as price increases slowed in transport, recreation and culture, and food with the biggest downward pressure coming from fuel.
- **The Bank of England has held interest rates at 5.25%**, it's the third time in a row the Bank has decided to leave the rate - which is the highest in 15 years - unchanged. Six members of the nine-person Monetary Policy Committee - which makes the decision - voted for no change while the other three wanted an increase to 5.5%. Higher interest rates are intended to lower inflation, by reducing people's spending power. Bank governor Andrew Bailey says "we've come a long way" in bringing down inflation this year, but there is "still some way to go".
- Given that prices continue to rise and interest rates remain high, it is **positive that average wage growth continues to outstrip the rate of inflation. Annual growth in regular pay (excluding bonuses) in Great Britain was 7.3%** in August to October 2023, this growth continues to remain strong but is not as high as in recent periods. **Annual growth in employees' average total pay (including bonuses) was 7.2%**. Annual average regular earnings growth for the public sector was 6.9% in August to October 2023, and is among the highest regular annual growth rates since comparable records began in 2001. Annual average regular earnings growth for the private sector was 7.3%. **In real terms (adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH)), annual growth for total pay rose on the year by 1.3%, and regular pay rose on the year by 1.4%.**

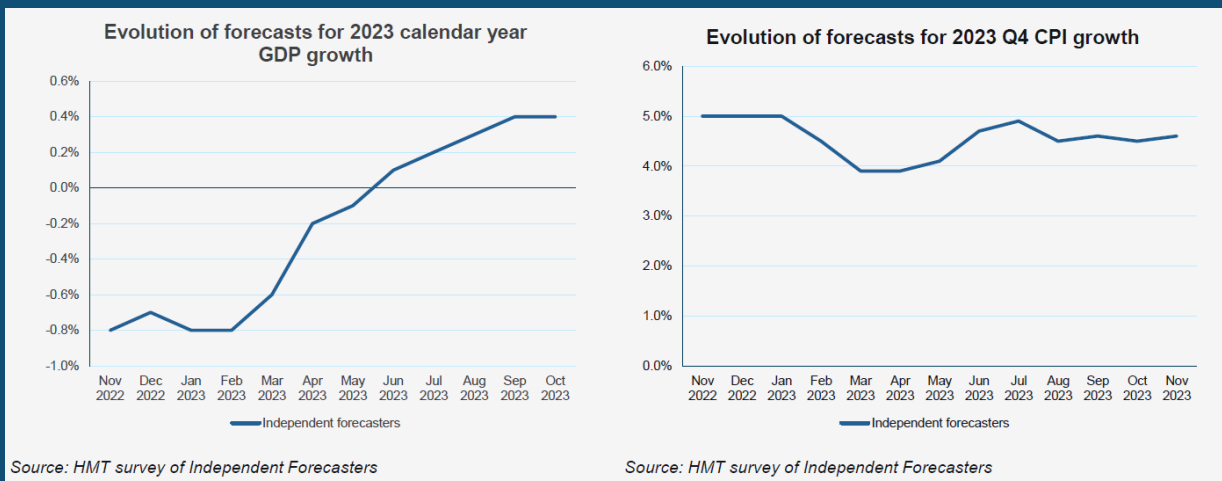


- **There still remain strikes over pay in important parts of the economy, including NHS consultants, junior doctors, and rail workers.** There were 131,000 working days lost because of labour disputes across the UK in October 2023. Three-fifths of the labour disputes were in the health and social work sector. In October 2023, 49,000 workers were involved in labour disputes, the lowest number since June 2022.
- **Eight million people on means-tested benefits will receive a cost-of-living payment in February to help with high bills.** The February payment of £299 is the last of three instalments that totalled £900, which will have been paid within a year.
- The fuel poverty charity, **National Energy Action**, reported that **2 million people have gone without fuel in the last 3 months due to poverty** according to recent polling. Estimates also predict this to rise to 6.5 million in January when the new OFCOM price cap rises, a rise of 4.5 million from October 2021.
- Research by the **universities of Bournemouth, Exeter and Sheffield** shows that **average UK food bills have risen by more than £600 over the past two years due to extreme weather and higher energy prices**, with more extreme or unseasonal weather accounted for one-third of all food price inflation in the UK this year.
- Analysis by the estate and lettings agent **Savills** has found **average private rents in Great Britain have soared by more than a quarter since the start of the Covid pandemic** and will keep rising.
- **Councils have warned that rises in the cost of living as well as a rise in the cost of housing is placing growing pressure on temporary accommodation and increasing the risk of homelessness.** Cllr Shaun Davies, Chair of the LGA said: "We're seeing an exodus of people in the private rented sector who are coming to councils for support. There's no council in the country that has an empty stock of temporary accommodation."

- According to research by **Citizens Advice**, **roughly 15.1 million people - more than one in four UK adults - reported they're likely to buy goods on credit using Buy-now-pay-later (BNPL) schemes to help with festive spending**. The advice service is warning that a delay in bringing in buy-now-pay-later regulation is putting consumers already facing tough financial situations at risk of unmanageable debt levels and even bailiff action due to the lack of affordability checks.

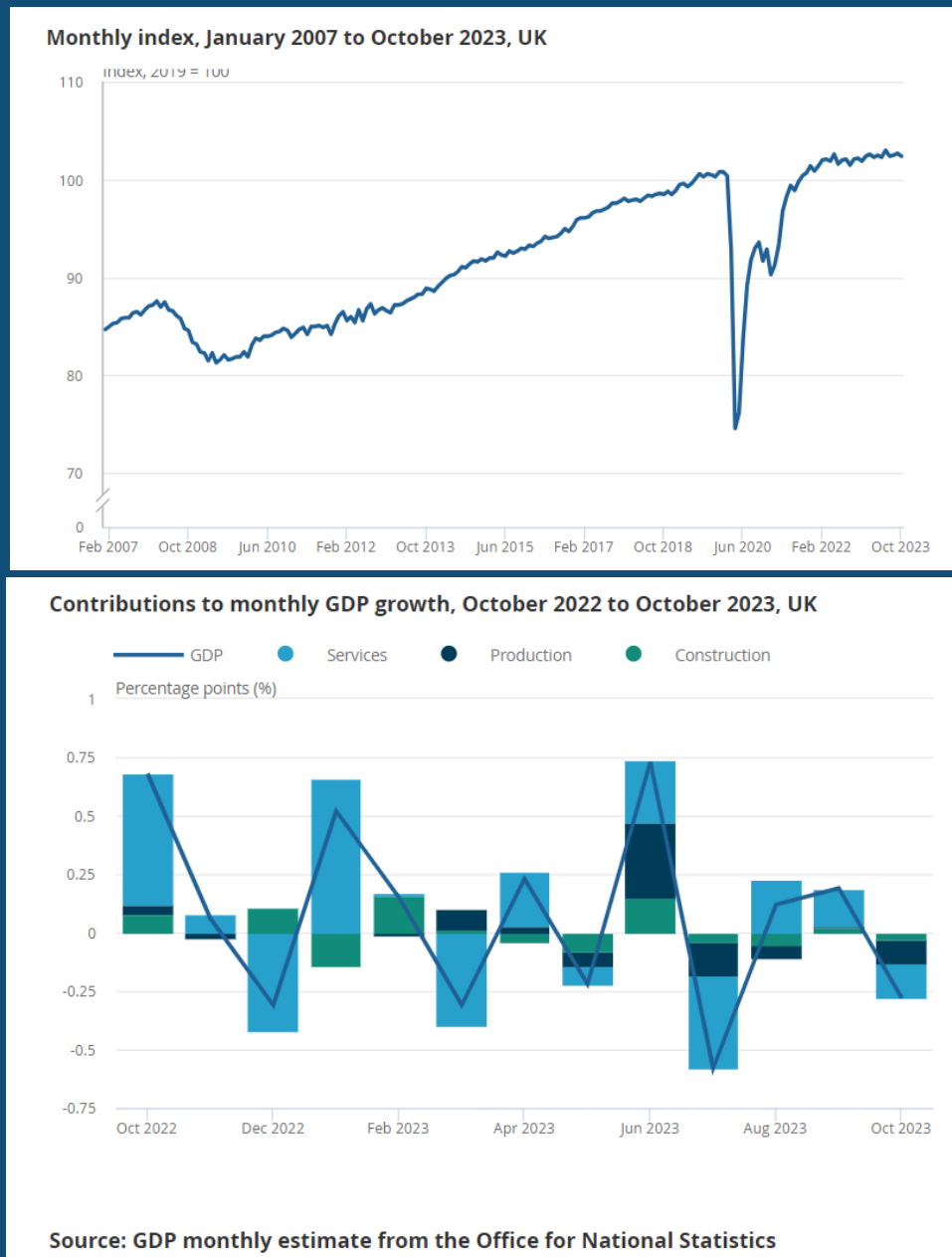
Economy

- The **Office for National Statistics** has shown at their latest Economic Forum how **the economy has shown more resilience this year than expected, while inflation has proven to be more persistent** based on HMT survey of Independent Forecasters.



- Analysis by the **Tony Blair Institute** has found **obesity has cost the UK economy nearly £100 billion a year**. The analysis shows that the cost of people being overweight in the UK has soared from £58 billion in 2020 to £98 billion, with obesity impacting national productivity. This has prompted calls for a government crackdown on unhealthy food and a drive to promote fresh ingredients.
- The **latest quarterly GDP data shows that the UK economy is estimated to have shown no growth in the three months to October 2023**, compared to the previous quarter.
- **Monthly GDP is estimated to have fallen by 0.3% in October 2023**, following growth of 0.2% in September 2023, as higher interest rates and bad weather held back growth.
- **Services output fell by 0.2% in October 2023**, driven by a fall in information and communication, and was the main contributor to the fall in growth in GDP; this follows growth of 0.2% in September 2023.
- **Production output fell by 0.8% in October 2023**, driven by widespread declines in manufacturing, after showing no growth in September 2023.
- **The construction sector fell by 0.5% in October 2023** after growth of 0.4% in September 2023.

GDP Monthly index, January 2007 to October 2023, UK



Business Conditions

- Going into the festive period is normally a time of the year when we would expect business conditions to be more buoyant, however it is clear that **many businesses are struggling due to a wide range of factors including high interest rates and energy prices, increased commodity costs, wage pressures, supply-chain constraints, lower consumer confidence and persistent labour market challenges.** This is reflected in the **high number of businesses reporting a decrease in turnover, increasing insolvencies and unemployment on the rise.** It will be vital that we support viable businesses during these challenging times to survive and then grow.
- The following charts show the latest results from Wave 97 of the **Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS)**, which was live from 27 November to 10 December 2023.

Headline figures from the Business Insights and Conditions Survey



- Nearly a quarter (24%) of trading businesses reported an **increase in the prices of goods or services bought** in November 2023 when compared with October 2023, while 9% of businesses reported an **increase in the prices of goods or services sold** over the same period, both broadly stable when comparing October 2023 with September 2023.
- Among trading businesses, more than 1 in 6 (18%) **expect to increase the prices of goods or services they sell in January 2024**; energy prices were the most commonly given reason for considering doing so (25%), an increase of three percentage points from expectations for December 2023.
- **Almost a quarter (23%) of trading businesses reported that their turnover had decreased in November 2023** compared with the previous calendar month, with

15% reporting that their **turnover was higher**; both of these figures are broadly stable with October 2023.

- **When looking ahead to January 2024, more than a quarter (26%) of trading businesses expect their turnover to decrease**, up three percentage points from expectations for December 2023; while 12% reported that they **expect their turnover to increase**, down four percentage points over the same period.
- Approximately 1 in 7 (15%) trading businesses reported that their **overall performance had increased in November 2023** compared with the same calendar month last year, broadly stable from October 2023 compared with October 2022; in comparison, 17% reported their **performance had decreased**, and 55% reported their **performance had stayed the same**.
- **Almost two-thirds (64%) of businesses reported some form of concern for their business when looking ahead to January 2024**; this is an increase of two percentage points from concerns reported for December 2023, and the first rise in this figure since April 2023.
- **In November 2023 there were a total of 2,466 company insolvencies in England and Wales, 21% higher than the number registered in the previous year (2,032 in November 2022), and 177% higher than the number registered three years previously: 890 in November 2020**). The main concern around company and individual insolvencies are associated issues such as mental health and homelessness.

Labour Market

- In summary, workforce jobs in the UK are now at record high levels with payrolled employees largely unchanged this month. Overall employment was largely unchanged this month and remains below pre-pandemic levels, unemployment was largely unchanged and is above pre-pandemic levels, while economic inactivity was also largely unchanged and remains above pre-pandemic levels. Job vacancies have seen a further decline which reflects the long-term trend but remain above pre-pandemic levels.
- The following charts shows the latest **labour market position** and the latest Office for National Statistics data for August 2023 to October 2023:

Payrolled employees

The number of payrolled employees

Monthly change: ▼ -13,000
Since Feb 2020: ▲ 1,183,000

The number of payrolled employees is now well above pre-pandemic levels.

Source: PAYE RTI from HMRC

millions



Adjusted experimental employment rate

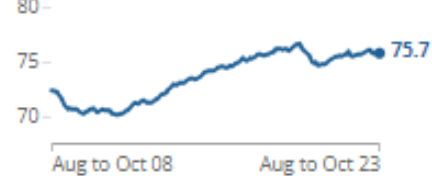
Employment rate (all aged 16 to 64)

Quarterly change: ◀▶ 0.0pps
Since Dec-Feb 2020: ▼ -0.8pps

The adjusted experimental employment rate is largely unchanged on the quarter but up on the year, and is still below pre-pandemic rates.

Source: LFS from ONS, PAYE RTI from HMRC and Claimant Count from ONS

%



Adjusted experimental unemployment rate

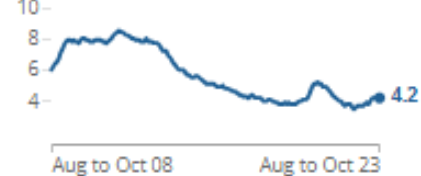
Unemployment rate (all aged 16+)

Quarterly change: ◀▶ 0.0pps
Since Dec-Feb 2020: ▲ 0.3pps

The adjusted experimental unemployment rate is largely unchanged on the quarter but up on the year, and above pre-pandemic rates.

Source: LFS from ONS, PAYE RTI from HMRC and Claimant Count from ONS

%



Adjusted experimental inactivity rate

Economic inactivity rate (all aged 16 to 64)

Quarterly change: ◀▶ 0pps
Since Dec-Feb 2020: ▲ 0.6pps

The adjusted experimental economic inactivity rate is largely unchanged on the quarter and down on the year, but still above pre-pandemic rates.

Source: LFS from ONS, PAYE RTI from HMRC and Claimant Count from ONS

%



Job vacancies

Number of job vacancies

Quarterly change: ▼ -45,000
Since Jan-Mar 2020: ▲ 148,000

Vacancies decreased on the quarter but are above pre-pandemic levels.

Source: Vacancy Survey from ONS

thousands



- **The estimated number of workforce jobs in the UK in September 2023 was a record 36.8 million, an increase of 210,000 from June 2023.** The total number of jobs includes both employee jobs and self-employment jobs. The estimated number of employee jobs has been on a largely upwards trend since September 2020, resulting in a record high of 32.5 million in September 2023.
- **The estimate of payrolled employees in the UK for November 2023 was largely unchanged compared with the revised October 2023 figure, down 13,000 to 30.2 million.** The November 2023 estimate should be treated as a provisional estimate and is likely to be revised when more data are received next month. **Payrolled employees are 1.18m above pre-pandemic levels.**
- Because of the increased uncertainty around the Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates, we are publishing an alternative series of estimates of UK employment, unemployment, and economic inactivity. These figures were derived using growth rates from Pay As You Earn Real Time Information (excluding the early flash estimate) and the Claimant Count for the periods from May to July 2023 onwards. This is to provide a more considered view of the labour market while the LFS estimates are uncertain.
- These alternative ONS estimates for August to October 2023 show that:
 - the **UK employment rate** (for those aged 16 to 64 years) was largely unchanged on the quarter at 75.7% and **0.8 percentage points below pre-pandemic.**
 - the **UK unemployment rate** (for those aged 16 years and over) was largely unchanged on the quarter at 4.2% and **0.3 percentage points above pre-pandemic.**
 - the **UK economic inactivity rate** (for those aged 16 to 64 years) was largely unchanged on the quarter at 20.9% and **0.6 percentage points above pre-pandemic.**
- In September to November 2023, the estimated number of **vacancies** in the UK fell by 45,000 on the quarter to 949,000. Vacancies fell on the quarter for the 17th consecutive period, the **longest consecutive run of quarterly falls ever recorded but still 148,000 above pre-pandemic levels.**
- **The Government is to invest £400 million in its plans to expand free childcare for working parents in England from April.** The Department for Education has also announced an increase in funding rates for nursery places, with hourly rates available to providers increasing to £11.22 for under-tuos, £8.28 for two-year-olds, and £5.88 for three and four-year-olds.
- The **Recruitment and Employment Confederation** has said that **UK employers are limiting hiring permanent staff due to economic stresses, as demand for permanent plunges at the second fastest rate since the pandemic.** The REC has said that permanent staff appointments have only dropped faster prior to June 2020, the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and first lockdown.
- According to the **Nursing and Midwifery Council, the number of registered**

nurses in the UK has hit a record high, with 20,000 more nurses have been recruited in the last 6 months. The NMC has called the strong recruitment numbers 'encouraging given the well-publicised pressure on health and care services at a time of rising demand for care' however they have warned against unethical recruitment from 'red list' countries who are also facing healthcare challenges.

- **Care companies fear the announcement overseas care workers will no longer be able to bring their families will put potential recruits off moving to the UK.** Home Office figures indicate nearly 144,000 care workers, who arrived in the UK in the year up to September 2023, brought almost 174,000 family members with them.

Green Economy

- Ahead of the COP28 climate summit the **British Chambers of Commerce warned that Rishi Sunak's green goals are under threat from a lack of infrastructure** such as car charging points. The head of the British Chambers of Commerce, Shevaun Haviland, warned that the Government was failing to provide a "functioning public realm" which would enable firms to cut their carbon emissions.
- **Energy minister says hydrogen will "not play a major role" in heating homes in the UK.** Lord Callanan, says hydrogen could play a "small role in some localised areas" but "there's no way that could be practically achieved" on a large scale.
- **England will get a new national park as part of a government set of "nature pledges" to give greater access and protection to the countryside.** Natural England will consider a list of possible sites, which could include the Chilterns, the Cotswolds and Dorset.

Transport

- It is reported that a **British tech firm has created a robot named 'Robotiz3d' with the sole purpose of fixing potholes and can even assess the condition of the road to assist local authorities in preventing potholes developing.** The LGA has said that extra funding in line with inflation "would help councils focus on long-term investment in existing roads, delivering preventative maintenance and reducing the occurrence of potholes in the first place, which are more expensive to repair".

Conclusion

- In conclusion, it is a **real positive that the economy has shown more resilience this year than expected**, however **business conditions remain challenging** with latest GDP figures showing a fall in the size of the UK economy.
- Clearly, **persistent inflation and high interest rates are holding back growth**, the **Government's plan** that was announced in the Autumn Statement will be vital in addressing these ongoing challenges and support business growth in 2024.
- While this plan is being put in place it is important that we **continue to support businesses that are struggling but viable and help prevent business failure.** At

the same time we will **help new businesses to start-up and grow**, and **support existing businesses that are flourishing in growth sectors to step-up and generate further high value jobs in Staffordshire**.

- Given the ongoing cost-of-living crisis it is **encouraging that average pay growth is now above the rate of inflation** meaning that workers are in a better financial position leading into Christmas.
- The **labour market has softened** with job vacancies continuing to decline and at the same time we are unfortunately seeing people laid off, which points to the **increased need for unemployment support** to move people quickly back into work. Positively our Jobs and Careers Brokerage service is now in a position to support residents that find themselves out of work and although recruitment is declining there **still remain more job vacancies than pre-pandemic**.
- **In Staffordshire we have a confident, diverse, and robust economy**, demonstrated by the improvement and recovery witnessed since the last lockdown due to Covid. As the **ongoing global and national socio-economic challenges** persist it remains **vital that local partners work together to support local businesses and residents**. We continue to deliver the **Staffordshire Means Back to Business Programme** which has helped hundreds of Staffordshire **businesses transition to new business models including diversification, digitisation and greenification to improve their viability and sustainability**.
- **We continue to support residents into work and help businesses address ongoing labour shortages and skills gaps** to aid survival and growth. A key part of this being the recently **established Staffordshire County Council Jobs and Careers Service** which is designed to match local people, employers, and training providers to fill jobs and provide people with the jobs and careers they need.
- Alongside this the **Government's 'Plan for Jobs' schemes such as Restart, and Skills Bootcamps** have an important role to play in **ensuring that local residents have the skills and training needed within the local economy to support increased growth, productivity, and prosperity**. Reskilling and upskilling residents from declining sectors into priority growth areas of the economy such as digital, green, advanced manufacturing, advanced logistics, construction, and health and social care where they can access higher value better paid jobs will be key.

Business and Individual Insolvencies

This section covers the latest Insolvency Service monthly insolvency statistics¹ for November 2023, which shows the number of new companies and individuals who are unable to pay debts and enter a formal insolvency procedure.

Company Insolvencies

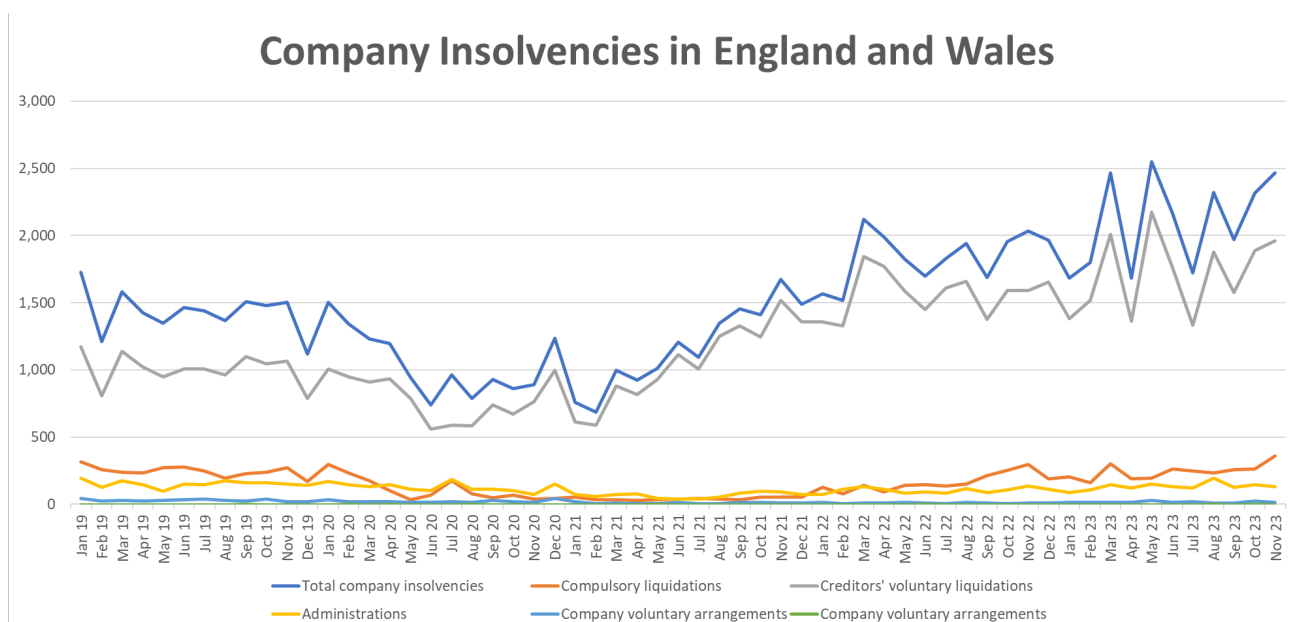
In November 2023 there were a total of 2,466 company insolvencies in England and Wales.

The overall number of **company insolvencies are 21% higher than the number registered in the previous year (2,032 in November 2022), and 177% higher than the number registered three years previously: 890 in November 2020).** Please note that due to the volatility of the underlying data the Insolvency Service recommends comparisons are made with the same month in previous years rather than with the previous month.

There were 359 compulsory liquidations in November 2023, which is 22% higher than the number in November 2022, and 870% higher than in November 2020. Numbers of compulsory liquidations have increased from historical lows seen during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, partly as a result in the increase of winding-up petitions presented by HMRC.

In November 2023 there were 1,962 Creditors' Voluntary Liquidations (CVLs), 23% higher than November 2022, and 156% higher than November 2020. Numbers of administrations are higher than pandemic levels at 82% higher than November 2020, however Company Voluntary Arrangements (CVAs) are lower than pandemic levels at 20% below November 2020 levels.

Company insolvencies between December 2022 and November 2023 are 16% higher compared to a year earlier, representing 3,500 more businesses.



Sources: Insolvency Service (compulsory liquidations only); Companies House (all other insolvency types)

¹Source: The Insolvency Service – [Monthly Insolvency Statistics, November 2023](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/monthly-insolvency-statistics) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

The sectors to have seen the largest number of company insolvencies between November 2022 and October 2023 continue to be the Construction sector (4,317), Wholesale & Retail sector (3,855) and Accommodation & Food Service sector (3,571). Levels exceed those seen for the same period the previous year with the Construction sector 7% higher, Wholesale & Retail sector 26% higher, and Accommodation & Food Service sector 40% higher than levels seen a year earlier. This can be attributed to higher commodity costs, higher energy costs, lower consumer confidence/demand, the longer-term impact of the pandemic along with the higher cost of living impact, interest rate and inflation increases.

Individual Insolvencies

There were **8,243 total individual insolvencies in November 2023**, which was 21% lower than in November 2022, and 12% lower than in November 2020.

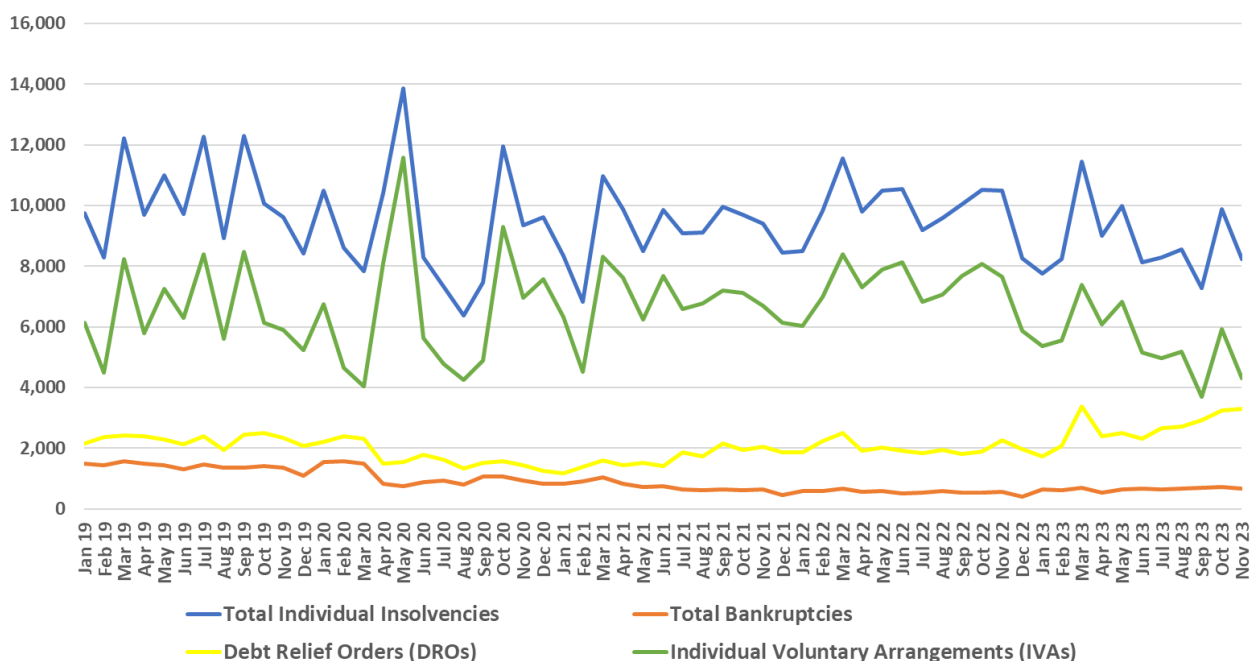
For individuals, **661 bankruptcies were registered in November 2023**, which was 18% higher than in November 2022, but 30% lower than in November 2020.

There were **3,290 Debt Relief Orders (DROs) in October 2023**, which was 45% higher than in November 2022, and 130% higher than in November 2020.

There were, on average, **4,292 Individual Voluntary Arrangements (IVAs) registered in November 2023**, which is 44% lower than November 2022, and 38% lower than November 2020.

Total Individual Insolvencies between December 2022 and November 2023 are 12% lower than the same period a year earlier, representing a decrease of 13,900.

Individual Insolvencies in England and Wales



Sources: Insolvency Service

There were **7,484 Breathing Space registrations in November 2023, which is 10% higher than the number registered in November 2022.** Of these, 7,351 were Standard Breathing Space registrations, which is 10% higher than in November 2022, and 133 were Mental Health Breathing Space registrations, which is 24% higher than the number in November 2022.

From the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic until mid-2021, overall numbers of company and individual insolvencies were low when compared with pre-pandemic levels. This is likely to have been partly driven by government measures put in place to support businesses and individuals during this time. **Company insolvency numbers have now returned to and exceeded pre-pandemic levels. For individuals, numbers of bankruptcies remain lower as do individual voluntary arrangements, but debt relief orders are higher than pre-pandemic levels.**

The main concern around company and individual insolvencies are associated issues such as mental health and homelessness.

Claimant Count²

The following table highlights the level of Universal Credit claimants in the Staffordshire Districts and each of the Strategic Authorities in the West Midlands Region:

Claimant Count (Universal Credit) Statistics: November 2023

Area	Claimant Count Rate (November 2022)	Claimant Count Rate (October 2023)	Claimant Count Rate ¹ (November 2023)	Number of Claimants (November 2023)	Monthly Change in Claimants (Numbers)	Monthly Change in Claimants (%)	Change in Claimants since March 2020 (Numbers)	Change in Claimants since March 2020 (%)
England	3.6	3.7	3.8	1,349,985	26,240	2.0%	286,480	27.0%
West Midlands	4.7	4.8	4.9	178,915	2,495	1.4%	34,565	24.0%
SSLEP	3.3	3.3	3.4	23,795	585	2.5%	4,425	23.0%
Birmingham	8.2	8.5	8.6	63,535	905	1.4%	14,165	29.0%
Wolverhampton	7.2	7.3	7.3	12,075	20	0.2%	1,695	16.0%
Sandwell	6.1	6.1	6.3	13,555	270	2.0%	2,775	26.0%
Coventry	5.2	5.5	5.5	12,345	-35	-0.3%	4,345	54.0%
Walsall	5.4	5.5	5.5	9,510	15	0.2%	905	11.0%
Stoke-on-Trent	5.2	5.3	5.4	8,765	240	2.8%	1,445	20.0%
Dudley	4.6	4.5	4.6	9,115	180	2.0%	600	7.0%
Telford and Wrekin	3.5	3.5	3.5	4,020	-5	-0.1%	590	17.0%
Solihull	3.1	3.1	3.2	4,140	95	2.3%	490	13.0%
Worcestershire	3.1	2.9	2.9	10,640	245	2.4%	2,335	28.0%
Staffordshire	2.7	2.8	2.8	15,030	340	2.3%	2,980	25.0%
Warwickshire	2.6	2.5	2.5	9,405	70	0.7%	1,575	20.0%
Herefordshire, County of	2.3	2.2	2.3	2,505	70	2.9%	395	19.0%
Shropshire	2.4	2.2	2.2	4,270	75	1.8%	260	6.0%
Tamworth	3.3	3.3	3.4	1,670	55	3.4%	180	12.0%
Cannock Chase	3.2	3.3	3.3	2,100	55	2.7%	445	27.0%
East Staffordshire	2.9	3.3	3.3	2,595	15	0.6%	875	51.0%
Newcastle-under-Lyme	2.9	3.0	3.1	2,340	65	2.9%	360	18.0%
South Staffordshire	2.6	2.5	2.6	1,710	40	2.4%	400	31.0%
Stafford	2.5	2.4	2.5	2,075	80	4.0%	420	25.0%
Lichfield	2.4	2.3	2.3	1,445	15	1.0%	125	9.0%
Staffordshire Moorlands	2.0	1.9	2.0	1,095	20	1.9%	175	19.0%

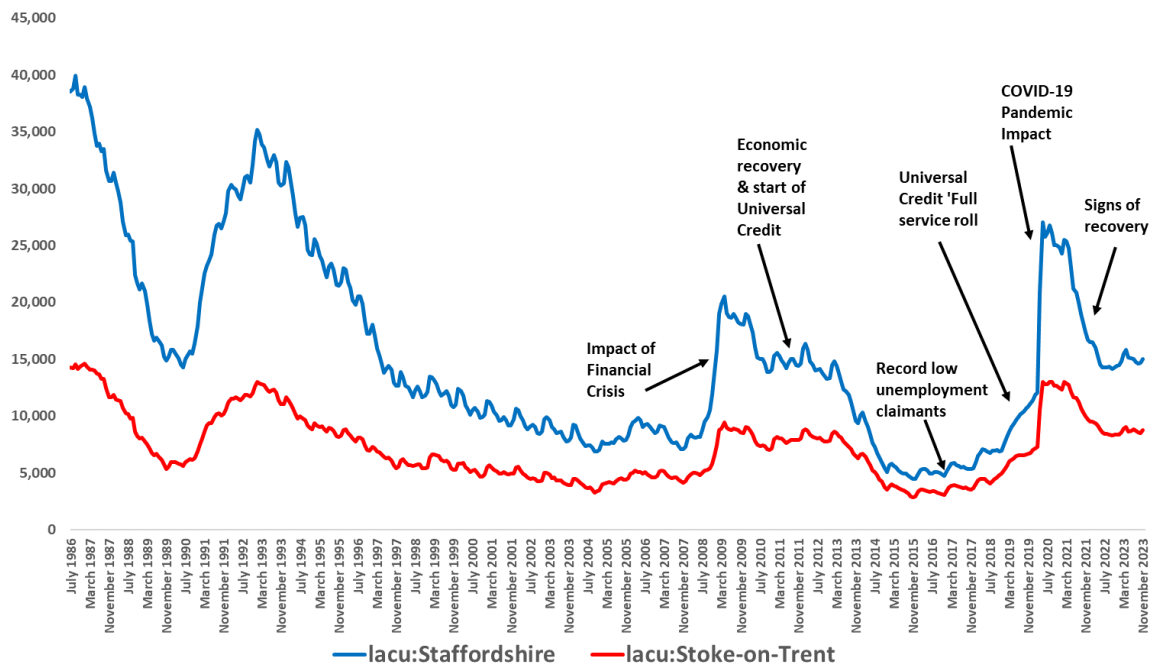
¹ The claimant rate is the proportion of the working age population claiming Universal Credit

- The claimant count in Staffordshire saw an **increase of 340 claimants in November**, with the **total number now at 15,030**.
- Over the last month, the **claimant rate for Staffordshire remained unchanged at 2.8%** of the working age population.
- The **rate in Staffordshire remains one of the lowest rates in the West Midlands and is far lower than the average for the region of 4.9%, and lower than the average for England at 3.8%**.
- Stoke-on-Trent saw an **increase of 240 claimants** over the same period with a **total of 8,765 claimants in November**, with the **rate increasing from 5.3% to 5.4%**.
- Whilst there was a higher proportional increase this month in Staffordshire of 2.3% than seen nationally (2.0%) or regionally (1.4%), **Staffordshire still has one of the lowest claimant rates in the region**. Youth claimants will remain a priority for further support that is already in place to help people that unfortunately find themselves unemployed to move into the high number of job vacancies that are present across Staffordshire.

² Source: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>

- **Demand for labour remains high with the number of vacancies still above pre-pandemic levels and there is currently estimated to be around 1 job vacancy available for every claimant within the county.** Therefore, our focus continues to be to support those that unfortunately find themselves unemployed, to transition into work.
- **The total number of Universal Credit (UC) claimants in Staffordshire is 25% or 2,980 higher than the level seen in March 2020 (pre-COVID),** which is largely in-line with the 27% increase seen nationally and 24% seen regionally.

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Claimant Count



- **It is important to note that not all claimants will be out of work.** The increases seen since COVID-19 struck in March need to be viewed in the context of the move to Universal Credit. Before Universal Credit, the Claimant Count was based upon Jobseeker’s Allowance claimants - people out of work but looking for a job. However, in response to COVID-19 the Government changed the criteria for Universal Credit to allow certain people on low incomes to claim whilst in work. Therefore, there will be a **proportion of claimants that will still be in work but claiming Universal Credit because they are on a low income or have seen reduced hours (under-employment)**, although from the data released by the Government it is not currently possible to quantify claimants that are unemployed or employed but on a low income.
- It is also key to recognise that although claimant numbers are higher than pre-pandemic levels, given our strong position going into the pandemic, we still perform well given **Staffordshire’s claimant rate is 2.8% of the working age population compared to 4.9% regionally and 3.8% nationally. In Stoke-on-Trent, the Claimant Count remains above both the regional and national averages at 5.4%.**

- This month there were increases in the claimant count across all of the districts in Staffordshire.
- Tamworth has the highest claimant rate at 3.4%, and Staffordshire Moorlands has the lowest at 2.0%. Significantly, all the Districts and Boroughs of Staffordshire remain lower than national and regional rates.

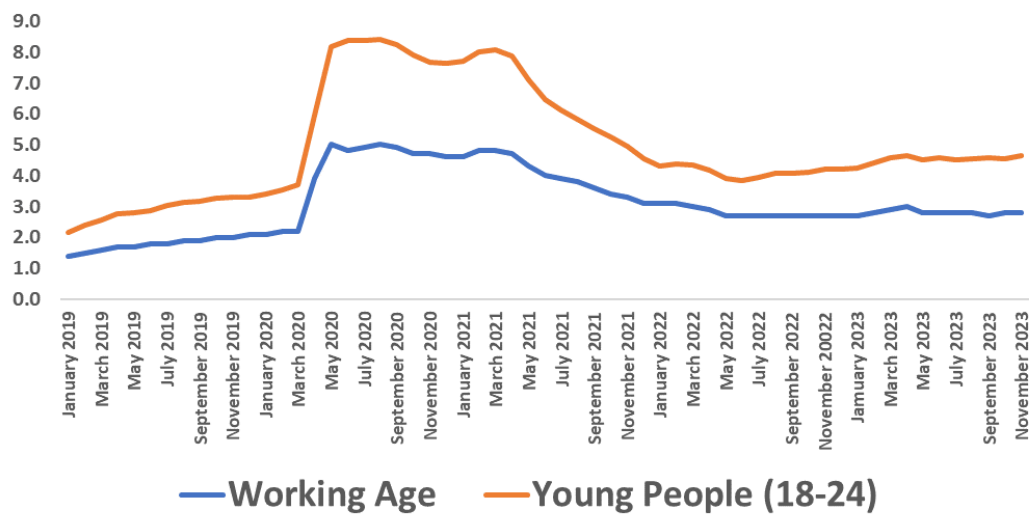
Youth Claimant Count

- This month the **youth claimant count in Staffordshire saw an increase of 60 claimants with a total of 2,915 young people.**
- **The proportion of young people in Staffordshire aged 18-24 that are claiming work-related Universal Credit increased from 4.6% to 4.7% this month.** This is lower than the national rate of 5.1% and far lower than the regional rate of 6.9%, both of which saw increases this month from 5.0% and 6.7% respectively.
- This month, **Stoke-on-Trent saw an increase of 50 claimants to a total of 1,725 claimants with the rate increasing from 7.4% the previous month to 7.6%.**

Youth Claimant Count (Universal Credit) Statistics: November 2023

Area	Youth Claimant Count Rate (November 2022)	Youth Claimant Count Rate (October 2023)	Youth Claimant Count Rate ¹ (November 2023)	Number of Youth Claimants (November 2023)	Monthly Change in Youth Claimants (Numbers)	Monthly Change in Youth Claimants (%)	Change in Youth Claimants since March 2020 (Numbers)	Change in Youth Claimants since March 2020 (%)
England	4.7	5.0	5.1	240,310	5,345	2.3%	42,580	21.5%
West Midlands	6.2	6.7	6.9	34,605	635	1.9%	6,700	24.0%
SSLEP	5.0	5.3	5.4	4,640	110	2.4%	820	21.5%
Wolverhampton	9.7	10.7	10.9	2,330	40	1.7%	420	22.0%
Sandwell	8.5	9.3	9.6	2,740	95	3.6%	625	29.6%
Birmingham	8.3	9.2	9.4	12,155	220	1.8%	3,050	33.5%
Walsall	8.2	9.3	9.1	2,060	-45	-2.1%	145	7.6%
Dudley	7.2	7.5	7.8	1,840	65	3.7%	90	5.1%
Stoke-on-Trent	7.1	7.4	7.6	1,725	50	3.0%	320	22.8%
Telford and Wrekin	5.9	5.9	5.9	885	5	0.6%	125	16.4%
Solihull	5.0	5.3	5.6	840	45	5.7%	15	1.8%
Coventry	4.7	5.1	5.2	2,215	15	0.7%	680	44.3%
Staffordshire	4.2	4.6	4.7	2,915	60	2.1%	500	20.7%
Worcestershire	4.6	4.6	4.7	1,970	35	1.8%	375	23.5%
Warwickshire	3.6	3.8	3.9	1,745	30	1.7%	410	30.7%
Herefordshire, County of	3.4	3.7	3.8	445	15	3.5%	30	7.2%
Shropshire	3.4	3.3	3.3	730	-5	-0.7%	-95	-11.5%
Cannock Chase	5.9	6.0	6.4	450	25	5.9%	85	23.3%
Tamworth	5.7	6.1	6.2	355	5	1.4%	60	20.3%
East Staffordshire	4.1	5.1	5.1	460	0	0.0%	140	43.8%
South Staffordshire	4.4	4.6	4.6	345	0	0.0%	95	38.0%
Stafford	4.5	4.2	4.4	380	20	5.6%	65	20.6%
Newcastle-under-Lyme	3.4	4.1	4.2	490	5	1.0%	65	15.3%
Lichfield	3.8	3.5	3.7	260	10	4.0%	-10	-3.7%
Staffordshire Moorlands	2.6	3.0	3.0	175	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

Claimant Rate and Youth Claimant Rate in Staffordshire



- There has been an increase in youth claimants in Cannock Chase, Lichfield, Stafford, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Tamworth. East Staffordshire, South Staffordshire and Staffordshire Moorlands saw no change.
- Cannock Chase has the highest rate at 6.4%, whilst Staffordshire Moorlands has the lowest rate at 3.0%. East Staffordshire and Newcastle-under-Lyme have the highest number of youth claimants at 460 and 490 respectively, whilst Staffordshire Moorlands has the lowest number of youth claimants at 175.
- Given that it is harder for these groups to find a new job it is increasingly vital that there is the right support in place to help young people find work such as through the Staffordshire Jobs and Careers Brokerage service, the Restart Scheme, and the new Skills Bootcamps to help prevent them becoming long-term unemployed.

Claimant Counts and Rates in Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Wards

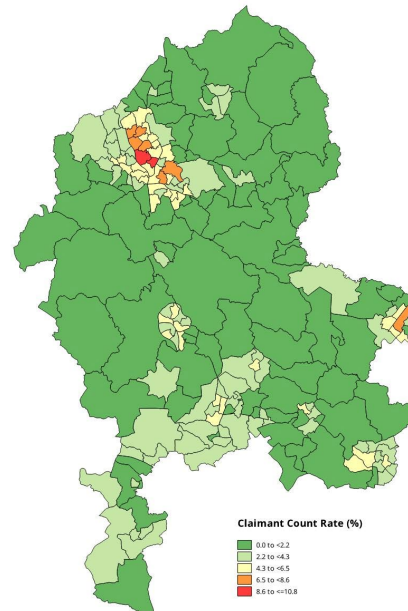
The following maps and tables provide the latest breakdown of the claimant count by wards in Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent.

Claimant Count Rate November 2023

Of the 201 wards in Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent, 55 were above the England average of 3.8% for the number of claimants as a proportion of the working age population.

Within the twenty highest claimant count rate wards, sixteen were in Stoke-on-Trent with Joiner's Square: 10.8%/495; Etruria & Hanley: 9.0%/485; Tunstall: 8.4%/355; Moorcroft: 8.1%/300; Burslem Central: 8.0%/365 total claimants.

In Staffordshire, the four wards all in East Staffordshire with the highest claimant count rates were Burton: 7.2%/215; Anglesey: 6.2%/335; Eton Park: 6.1%/300; Shobnall: 5.9%/320; total claimants.

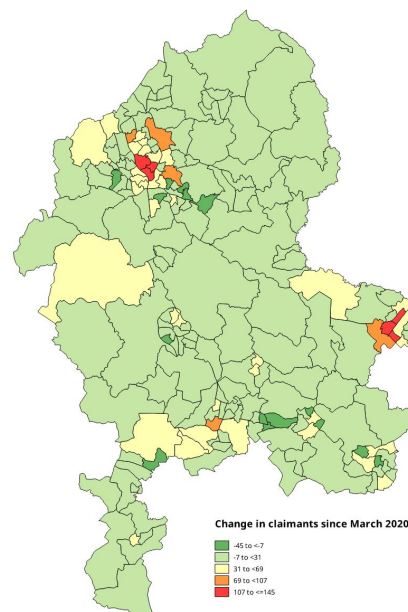


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Change in Claimant Count since March 2020

Of the top ten wards in Staffordshire with the highest change in the number of claimants since March 2020 there were six in Stoke-on-Trent including Hanley Park & Shelton (135 increase to 320); Etruria & Hanley (130 increase to 485); Joiner's Square (120 increase to 495); Tunstall (105 increase to 355); Bentilee & Ubbberley (95 increase to 495); Baddeley, Milton & Norton (75 increase to 405).

Of the remaining four wards in the top ten, all were in East Staffordshire including Anglesey with a 145 increase to 335 claimants; Eton Park with a 120 increase to 300 claimants; Shobnall with a 110 increase to 320 claimants; Branston with a 95 increase to 170 claimants



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Youth Claimant Counts and Rates in Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Wards

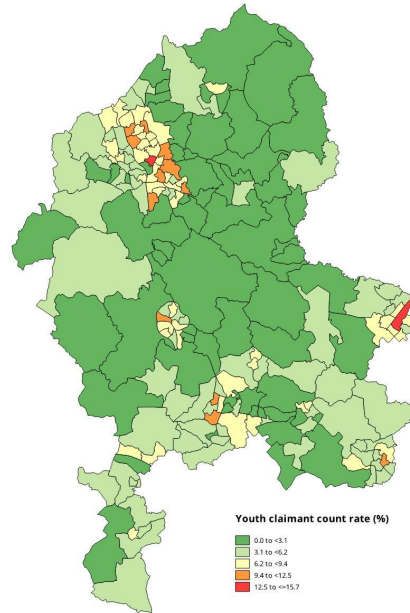
The following maps and tables provide the latest breakdown of the youth claimant count by wards in Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent.

Youth Claimant Count Rate November 2023

Of the 201 wards in Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent, 81 were above the England average of 5.1% for the number of claimants aged 18-24 as a proportion of the 18-24 population.

Of the top ten wards with the highest youth claimant count rate, six were in Stoke-on-Trent including Joiner's Square: 15.7%/120; Bentilee & Ubberley: 12.2%/110; Meir North: 10.8%/60; Fenton East: 10.7%/50; Tunstall 10.5%/65 total youth claimants.

In Staffordshire, the wards with the highest claimant count rates were Burton (East Staffordshire): 13%/50; Doxey & Castletown (Stafford): 11.6%/35; Cannock North (Cannock Chase): 11.3%/60; Glascote (Tamworth): 10.4%/60 total youth claimants.

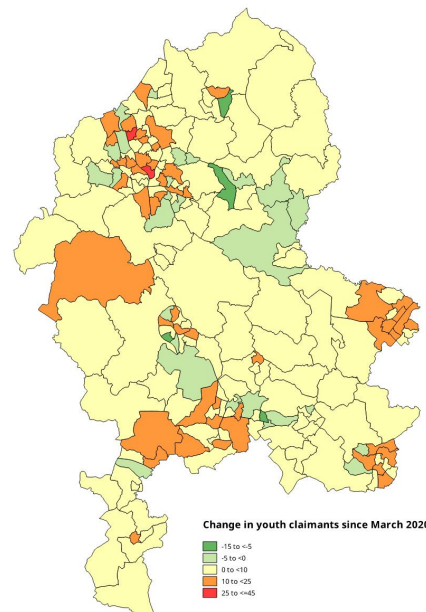


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Change in Youth Claimant Count since March 2020

Of the top ten wards in Staffordshire with the highest change in the number of youth claimants since March 2020, six were in Stoke-on-Trent including Hanley Park & Shelton (45 increase to 75); Tunstall (25 increase to 65); Joiner's Square (20 increase to 120); Bentilee & Ubberley (20 increase to 110).

In Staffordshire, the four wards with the highest change in the number of youth claimants since March 2020, were Shobnall (East Staffordshire) with a rise of 20 to 55; Branston (East Staffordshire) with a rise of 20 to 35; Burton (East Staffordshire) with a rise of 15 to 50; Doxey & Castletown (Stafford) with a rise of 15 to 35 total youth claimants.

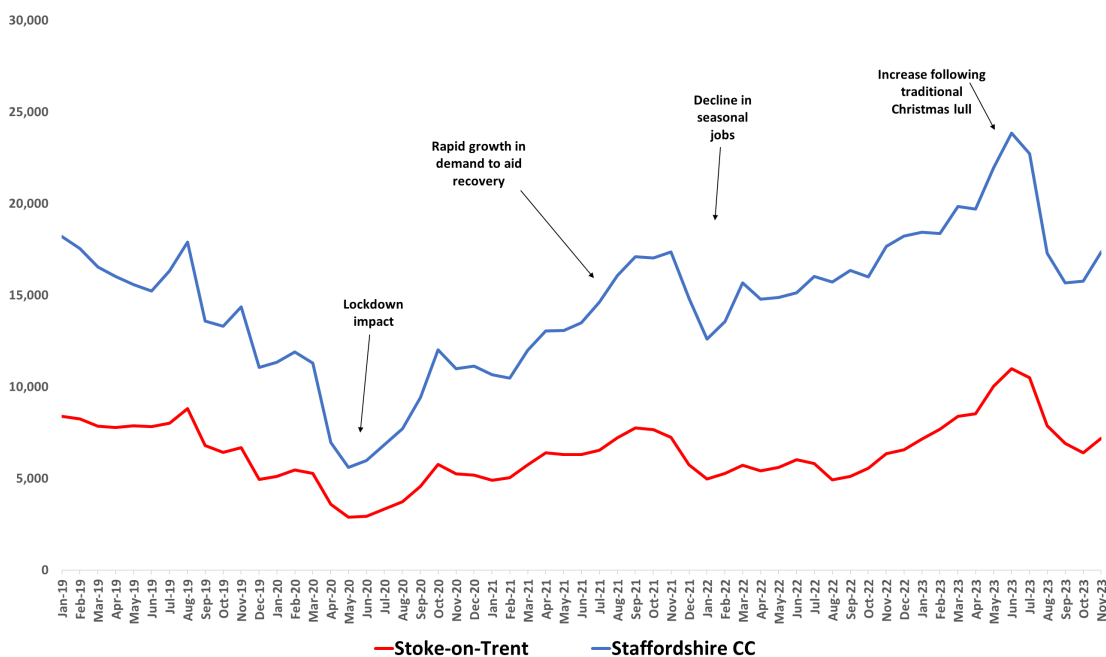


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Job Vacancies³

- **Staffordshire saw a 10% increase in the number of available job vacancies between October and November with a total of 17,300⁴. This continues to remain higher than the number of work-related benefit claimants.**
- **Stoke-on-Trent saw a 12% increase in job vacancies to a total of 7,200 which is lower than the number of claimants.**
- **Across the region in the last month there was a 9% increase, and nationally there was a 7% increase in job vacancies. Therefore, Staffordshire saw a higher proportional increase this month than both regional and national levels.**
- In November there has been a slight decrease in the number of available job vacancies, compared to a year ago in Staffordshire with the number of job adverts being posted 2% lower, whilst Stoke-on-Trent has increased 13%. The chart below indicates a recent declining trend overall from July this year which indicates a slowing down in the jobs market as a result of some business sectors being more cautious about recruitment due to the uncertainty in the economy. Overall, though the outlook is positive and recruitment demand remains strong with new job postings higher than pre-pandemic levels with Staffordshire job vacancies 46% higher and Stoke-on-Trent 32% higher.

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Unique Job Vacancies Trend



****Important to note that Lightcast (formerly EMSI/Burning Glass) live job vacancy data has been upgraded and improved through enhanced AI deduplication and sharper skill scraping of job postings.****

³ Source: Lightcast (formerly EMSI/Burning Glass)

⁴ Lightcast updated its deduplication algorithm for UK job postings on 17 November 2023. As a result of this change historic posting counts have decreased on average by 2% to 4%.

Monthly Trends in recruitment

- All of the occupational groups saw an increase in vacancies during November, with 'Caring, Leisure & Other Service occupations' and 'Process, Plant & Machine Operatives' seeing a 14% increase.
- The occupations to see the most significant increases during November include **Teaching Assistants, Care Workers & Home Carers, Sales related, Cleaners & Domestic, Warehouse Operatives, Other Administrative occupations, Large Goods Vehicle Drivers, Secondary Education Teaching Professionals, Quantity Surveyors, and Teaching Professionals.**

Annual Trends in job vacancies

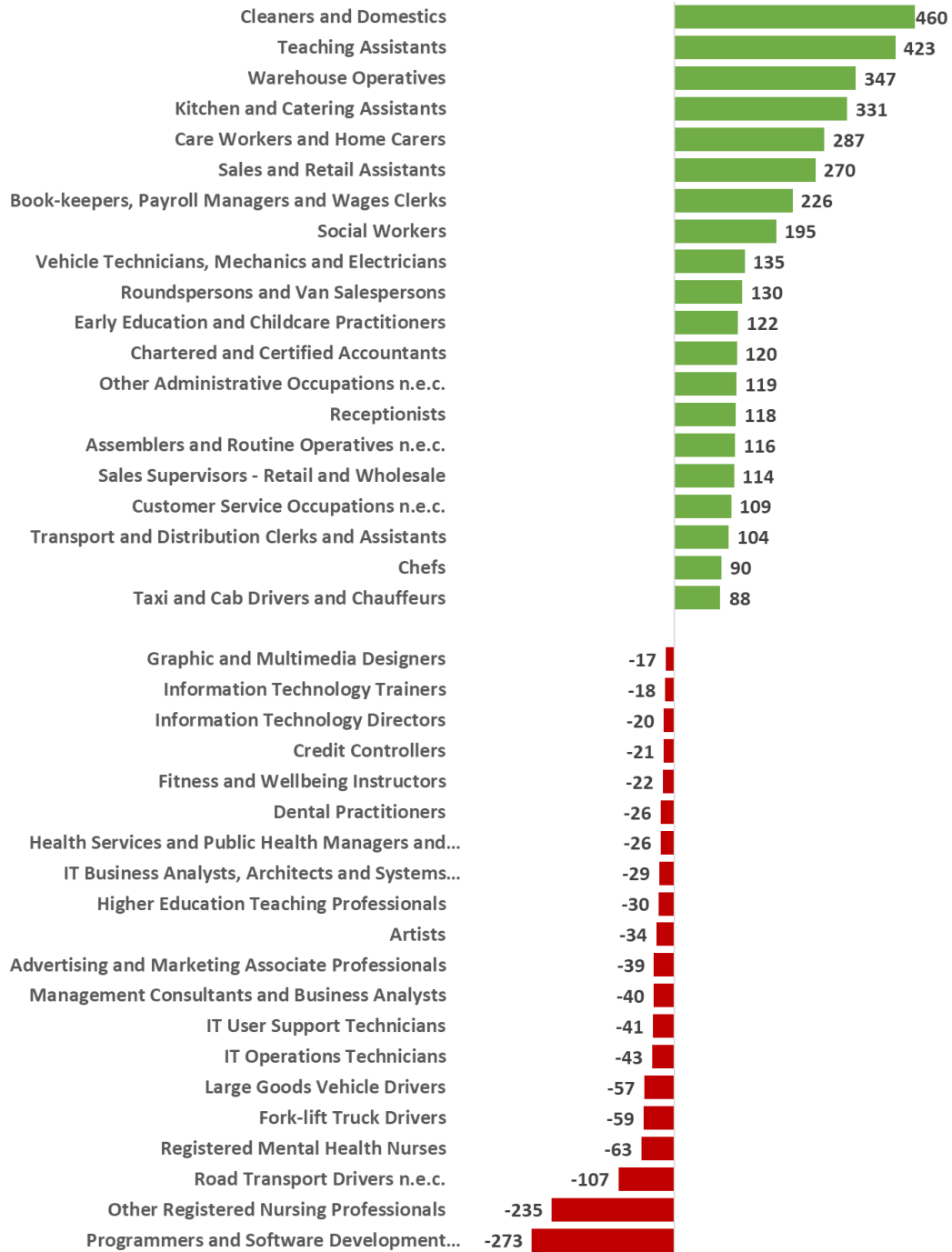
- The occupations to see the largest year-on-year increases include Housekeepers & related occupations (Cleaners & Domestic), cross sector business roles (Book Keepers, Payroll Managers & Wages Clerks; Administrative; Receptionists), Education (Teaching Assistants; Secondary Education Teaching Professionals), Health & Social Care (Social Workers), Wholesale & Retail sector (Sales related; Business Sales Executives; Sales and Retail Assistants), Construction (Quantity Surveyors; Pipe Fitters; Elementary Construction), Childcare (Early Education & Childcare Practitioners), Logistics (Large Goods Vehicle Drivers; Roundspersons & Van Salespersons), Hospitality sector (Kitchen and Catering Assistants), Transport (Taxi & Cab Drivers & Chauffeurs; Other Drivers & Transport Operatives), Skilled Trades (Electricians & Electrical Fitters).

Pre-COVID baseline trends in job vacancies

- It is also found that the main occupations with higher vacancies compared to pre-COVID are mainly found within:
 - **Housekeepers & related occupations** (Cleaners & Domestic)
 - **Education** (Teaching Assistants)
 - **Logistics** (Warehouse operatives; Roundspersons & Van Salespersons; Transport & Distribution Clerks and Assistants)
 - **Hospitality** (Kitchen and Catering Assistants; Chefs)
 - **Health and Social Care** (Care Workers and Home Carers; Social Workers)
 - **Retail & Wholesale** (Sales & Retail Assistants; Sales Supervisors)
 - **Cross sector business roles** (Bookkeepers, Payroll Managers & Wages Clerks; Chartered & Certified Accountants; Other Administrative; Receptionists; Customer Service)
 - **Motor Trade** (Vehicle Technicians, Mechanics and Electricians)
 - **Childcare** (Early Education & Childcare Practitioners)
 - **Manufacturing** (Assemblers & Routine Operatives)
 - **Transport** (Taxi & Cab Drivers & Chauffeurs)

This is reflective of the ongoing long term recruitment difficulties in these sectors.

Top 20 occupations increasing and top 20 declining between Feb 2020 (Pre-COVID) and Nov 2023 in SSLEP

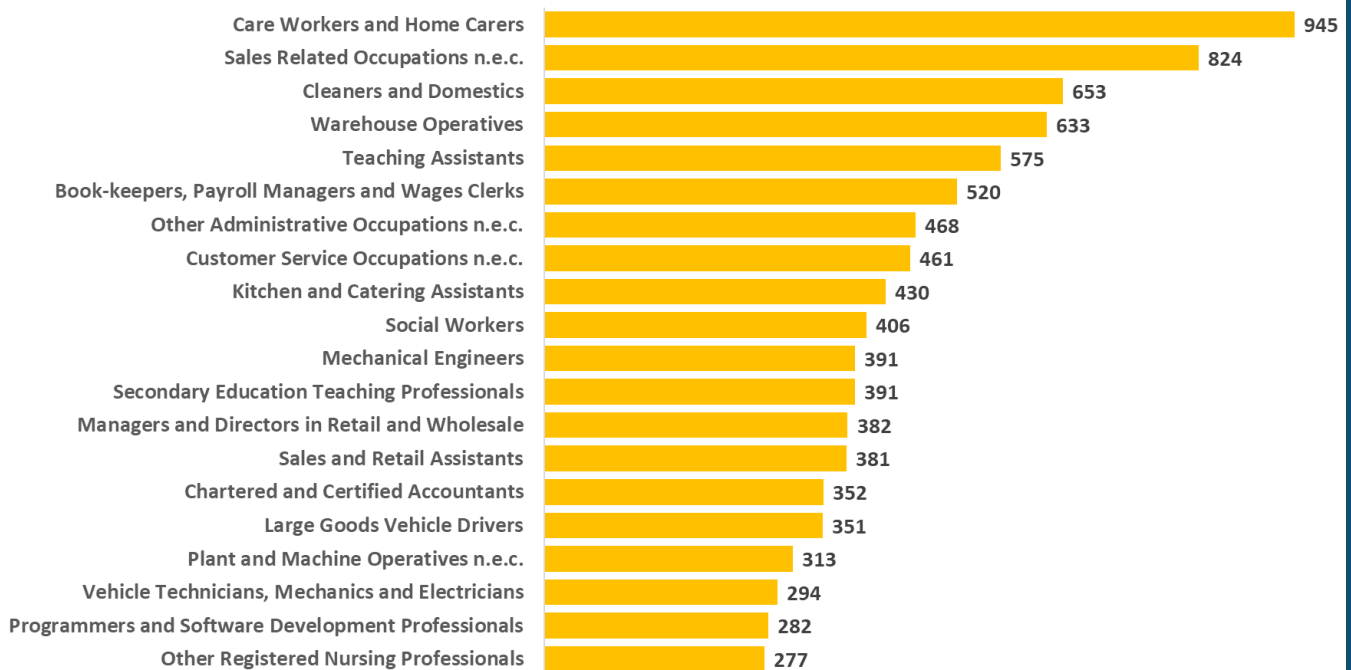


Top Occupations in Demand

- Considering the **top 20 job vacancy occupations in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire**, demand for roles in social care continue to remain high with **'Care Workers and Home Carers'** being the most in demand occupations.
- The following occupations **'Sales Related,' 'Cleaners & Domestics'** and **'Warehouse Operatives'** also have strong demand.

- In the Education sector there is particularly high demand for **'Teaching Assistants,'** **'Secondary Education Teaching Professionals.'**
- There is **strong demand for 'Bookkeepers, Payroll Managers & Wages Clerks,'** **'Administrative,'** **'Customer Service,'** **'Chartered & Certified Accountants,'** across business sectors to support business in their recovery, survival, and new methods of working.
- In the Hospitality sector, **'Kitchen and Catering Assistants'** remain the roles most in demand.
- There is high demand in the Health and Social Care sector for **'Social Workers,'** **'Registered Nursing Professionals.'**
- Demand for **'Managers & Directors in Retail & Wholesale,'** **'Sales and Retail Assistants,'** in the Retail and Wholesale sector also remain strong.
- In the Manufacturing sector **'Mechanical Engineers,'** **'Plant & Machine Operatives'** are most in demand.
- The Logistics sector continues to have high demand for **'Large Goods Vehicle Drivers.'**
- In the Motor Trade **'Vehicle Technicians, Mechanics and Electricians'** are in demand.
- In ICT demand for **'Programmers & Software Development Professionals'** is high.

Top 20 occupations in demand in SSLEP during November 2023



- It is in these areas of the economy where job vacancies remain particularly high and where we are hearing the most reports of **labour and skills shortages** with a mismatch of workers or skills to fill the vacant jobs.
- This has the **potential to slow down economic growth and limit business survival unless the labour shortage and skills gap is quickly and effectively addressed**. Clearly employment support organisations, skills providers and the Government's Plan for Jobs including the Restart schemes and new Skills Bootcamps have a vital role in upskilling and reskilling jobseekers into areas of demand and preventing them becoming long-term unemployed. Government and business sectors have a key role in ensuring that jobs in areas of demand are attracting workers with good pay and terms and conditions to help prevent labour shortages.
- It is clear there continues to be a high number of jobs available in the local economy and the need now is to ensure that there is a strong local labour pool with skilled workers able to fill these roles to support business recovery/survival and improve their own prosperity through better pay. The national and local support which is in place to support those that have been unfortunate enough to lose their jobs is vital in both **reskilling and upskilling** as well as enabling them to access the opportunities available. Also encouraging those that have become **economically inactive** due to COVID back into work will further help to address labour shortages and skills gaps.
- **Staffordshire County Council's new Job Brokerage Service** is designed to do exactly this by matching local people, employers, and training providers to fill jobs and provide people with the jobs and careers they need.
- There are also clear **emerging opportunities for job creation in digital (including online retail and e-commerce) and the green economy (including retrofitting homes to improve energy efficiency, electric cars e.g., Jaguar Land Rover and hydrogen e.g., JCB)**.
- We will also look to build on our existing strengths including **engineering and advanced manufacturing** through the adoption of AI, Automation and Machine Learning, **construction** to achieve Government house building targets and build major new infrastructure projects such as the West Midlands Freight Interchange, and **advanced logistics** with ecommerce creating continued demand and the recent announcement by Pets At Home in Stafford creating over 750 new jobs.

Notes

Claimant Count and ILO Unemployment Definitions

The Claimant Count is a measure of the number of working age people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed, including those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance plus those who claim Universal Credit and are required to seek work and be available for work.

ILO unemployment data is obtained from the national Labour Force Survey. The definition for unemployment is those without a job, want a job, have actively sought work in the last four weeks and are available to start work in the next two weeks, or are out of work, have found a job and are waiting to start work in the next two weeks.

Understanding the differences between the Claimant Count and ILO Unemployment

According to the UK Claimant Count for May, claimant unemployment increased to 2.8 million and a rate of 7.8% – a rise of 125% in just two months, the fastest rate of growth on record. However, the ILO measure shows that unemployment has remained largely unchanged at around 1.3 million and a rate of 3.9%. Understanding the reasons why there is this difference is important for policymakers trying to determine whether we are currently in the middle of an unemployment crisis or whether this is to come as the Job Retention Scheme (JRS) is gradually withdrawn.

The following section tries to explain this incredibly confusing, complicated, and often contradictory data.

The main reasons for the difference between the Claimant Count and ILO measures include:

- **The two measures describe different periods** – for claimant unemployment, the numbers refer to claimants on a specific 'count date' with the last three being 12 March, 9 April, and 14 May. Therefore, these are point-in-time estimates, and handily we can compare what the situation was about a week before the crisis (12 March) with how things were two months later (14 May).

The ILO measure is a three-month average of survey responses between early February and late April 2020. This means that two months pre-date the crisis, while one month (April) is since the crisis began. However, ONS does release single month estimates (latest available April 2020) which show a drop in employment in April of 320,000 explained almost entirely by fewer people self-employed but only slight increase of 40,000 unemployed. Instead, there is a steep rise in 'economic inactivity' which is those who are out of work but are not looking and/ or available for work.

- **Difference in measuring economic inactivity/worklessness** - the Claimant Count measures those who are required to look/be available for work as a condition of benefit, while the ILO measure is those who say that they actually are actively seeking

and available for work. The Labour Force Survey is recording a single month increase in the number of people out of work (unemployed and economically inactive) of 330,000, but nearly 290,000 of these people are not looking for work (economically inactive). The majority of this rise is people previously self-employed and are either not eligible for, or not yet been paid, income under the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS).

- **Claimant Count now includes more workers on low-income** - In the Claimant Count, people with earned income can be counted as claimant unemployed if their earnings in the reference month are below a set threshold (£338 per month for a single person, or £541 per month for a couple). Before Universal Credit (UC), short hours working was penalised and so these numbers were generally low. However, UC incentivises short-hours work, and so we have seen a growth in recent years in the number of people treated as being unemployed but who have some earnings. The detailed data for UC suggests that 190,000 of the 1 million increase between March and April was accounted for by working claimants - so around one fifth of the rise.
- **Difference in recording people who are 'in work'** - in the Labour Force Survey you are recorded as in employment even if you have not done any work that week but 'have a job or business that you were away from... (and that you expect to return to).' Obviously, this category of workers 'away' from work now captures about 9 million people furloughed under the Job Retention Scheme (JRS) who are continuing to earn, but it also includes people who consider themselves to be employees or self-employed but who have no earnings. 'Real time' Pay As You Earn data suggests that this may be mainly employees, with the number of paid employees falling by 450,000 between March and April. This 450,000 could include a large number of people who may have been due to start a job in March or April but have been told that their job isn't available yet and may also be people who had very few or irregular hours before the JRS was introduced and whom employers have not submitted a JRS claim. These people may be describing themselves as being workers with a job that they are away from, rather than as being actively seeking a new job.
- **Benefit take-up/eligibility impact on the Claimant Count** - given that the claimant count only counts those who claim benefit it may be under-stating the growth in worklessness. We know that many unemployed people do not claim, and particularly young people (usually due to eligibility). Under UC, there have been on average 450,000 more ILO unemployed young people than claimant unemployed and even if that gap narrows in the crisis, as tends to happen in recessions, it is possible that ILO youth unemployment will remain significantly higher than the claimant measure.

Summary table outlining the potential estimates for the Claimant Count rise in April

Potential Proportion of Claimant Count Change Mar-20 to Apr-20	Potential Number of Claimants	Potential Reasons for being a Claimant	Labour Force Survey Categorisation
44%	450,000	New Job Starters/PT employees/Self-employed with no income claiming Universal Credit not supported by JRS	In Employment - even if not done any work that week but 'have a job or business that were away from... (and that expect to return to)' – rather than unemployed
28%	292,500	Self-employed ceased trading or have very low income claiming Universal Credit (and are either not eligible for, or not yet been paid, income under the SEISS)	Economically inactive - people out of work but are not looking for work - majority people previously self-employed
18%	190,000	Working part-time low income workers claiming Universal Credit	In Employment
10%	100,000	Potential Redundancies	
100%	1,032,500	Claimant Count Increase Mar-20 to Apr-20	

- It is hoped that this analysis has provided further clarity as to why we have seen such a spike in the number of claimants early in the crisis. What is clear is that we have seen a record fall between March and April in the number of people working and not being supported by JRS. We have also seen worklessness rising at a faster rate than at any time before. Although very few of the decline in the numbers 'working' had translated into higher unemployment in April, it is envisaged that this may be the case if people are unable to get back into work quickly.
- Looking forward, the growth in claims for UC is slowing and so the growth in the Claimant Count is also likely to slow as well. That said claimant unemployment is currently at the highest level on record. The main concern now is what happens to many workers as JRS is gradually withdrawn and it is important that we are thinking now about how to support people that are made redundant and what policy interventions are needed.