Staffordshire County Council

Staffordshire Means Business

Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Economic Bulletin

Issue 66 - February 2026

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 SkillsAnalysis@staffordshire.gov.uk.

Kind Regards,

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**, as seen nationally, we saw unemployment, youth unemployment and dependency on work-related benefits increase during the energy and cost-of-living crisis.
- However, **over the last year we have seen a steady decline in the Claimant Count**, with residents either finding work or becoming economically inactive.
- The **number of job vacancies shows a decrease of 10% over the past year,** reflective of the challenging economic climate. This is a higher decrease than seen regionally and nationally, where job vacancies in the West Midlands have decreased 7% and nationally there has been a 6% decrease.
- **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, increased wage levels, and lower consumer demand**.
- Looking at the local data in more detail, the **number of work-related benefit claimants in Staffordshire now stands at 15,045, this is 310 fewer claimants than at the same time last year.** This is equivalent to a -2.0% annual reduction which is slightly higher than the reduction seen nationally (-1.6%) but slightly lower than regionally (-2.6%).
- The **claimant rate in Staffordshire is currently 2.7%** of the working age population, which has **decreased from 2.8% the same period last year.**
- **Staffordshire continues to have one of the lowest claimant rates in the region, far lower than the regional average 5.2% which decreased from 5.3% the previous year, and lower than the England average of 4.0% which remained the same as the previous year**.
- We will continue to support those residents that unfortunately find themselves out of work to access employment through our partnership working and dedicated Jobs Brokerage service.
- This month the **youth claimant count in Staffordshire stands at 3,280, this is 310 more youth claimants than at the same time last year.** This is equivalent to a 10.4% annual increase, which is slightly higher than the increases seen both regionally (10.0%) and nationally (9.9%).
- The **youth claimant rate in Staffordshire is currently 5.2% of the 18-24 population, which is an increase from 4.7% last year**. This is a concerning trend seen both regionally and nationally. It is important to note that **Staffordshire continues to be lower than the national rate of 5.7%, which increased from 5.2% and far lower than the regional rate of 7.8% which increased from 7.1%** over the last year. Our focus continues to be to

engage with our younger residents and support them to find employment or to continue in education and training.

- Turning to job vacancies, **Staffordshire saw a 10% decrease in the number of available job vacancies between January 2025 and January 2026 to a total of 11,200. This is lower than the number of work-related benefit claimants in Staffordshire. Stoke-on-Trent saw a decrease of 10% in job vacancies to a total of 4,400 which is significantly lower than the number of claimants. Across the region in the past year there was a 7% decrease, and nationally there was a 6% decrease in the number of job vacancies.**
- Considering the **top 20 job vacancy occupations in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent**, demand for roles in social care continue to remain high with **'Care Workers & Home Carers'** being the most in demand occupations.
- The following occupations, **'Cleaners & Domestics,' 'Sales Related'** and **'Teaching Assistants'** also have strong demand.
- In the Education sector there is particularly high demand for and **'Secondary Education Teaching Professionals'** and **'Teaching Professionals'.'**
- In the Hospitality sector, **'Kitchen & Catering Assistants'** roles are most in demand.
- The Logistics sector has high demand for **'Warehouse Operatives,' 'Large Goods Vehicle Drivers'** and **'Transport & Distribution Clerks/Assistants.'**
- There is high demand in the Health and Social Care sector for **'Social Workers.'**
- Demand for **'Managers & Directors'** in the Retail and Wholesale sector remain strong.
- There is strong demand for **'Customer Service occupations'** and **'Book-keepers, Payroll Managers & Wages Clerks'** across business sectors.
- In the Engineering sector **'Mechanical Engineers,' 'Plant & Machine Operatives,'** and **'Engineering Technicians'** are in demand.
- There is also high demand for **'Early Education & Childcare Practitioners.'**
- In the Financial sector **'Chartered & Certified Accountants'** are in demand.
- There is also strong demand for **'Assemblers and Routine Operatives.'**

- It is in these areas of the economy where job vacancies remain particularly high and where we are hearing reports of **labour and skills shortages** with a mismatch of workers or skills to fill 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 Connect to Work 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.

- 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** since COVID through the **Connect to Work Programme** 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 the digital economy (including online retail and e-commerce), construction sector (including retrofitting homes), the car industry e.g. electric cars at Jaguar Land Rover, and in manufacturing e.g. hydrogen combustion technology at 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. **Advanced logistics** within the ecommerce sector continue to drive demand, evidenced by Pets At Home in Stafford recently creating over 750 new jobs and Carlsberg Britvic investing £4 million in a new depot, with plans to create several hundred additional jobs.
- **We will continue to support our residents into work and ensure that Staffordshire has the strong workforce it needs to grow the economy.**

Local Initiatives

- We are continuing to prioritise support for businesses and people to help deliver growth across Staffordshire, 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 **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 is all in response to what you have 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?**
- **Businesses in Staffordshire can now apply for free energy assessments through the Green Solutions scheme**. The scheme aims to help businesses reduce their energy consumption and costs for a greener future and more sustainable business practices. Businesses will get a free energy assessment plus expert advice to help improve energy efficiency and support to implement the proposed measures. Firms signing up will also benefit from complimentary Carbon Literacy Training. To apply and submit an expression of interest, businesses can visit the official Green Solutions website. A dedicated member of the Green Solutions team will review the submission and reach out to discuss the next steps.
- **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 uses 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. 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:
  - contact 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. 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
- **Developer Indurent to invest £800m in Staffordshire**
  Developer Indurent plans to invest £800m in Staffordshire over the next few years. The industrial and logistics specialist is currently delivering or promoting six million sq. ft of space in the county, said senior director of planning Richard Hickman. "These sites are either in the planning process with a draft allocation, or they're sites that we're building on currently," said Hickman. "To bring those sites forward over the next few years, we're going to be investing something in the order of £800m. That's a huge investment and a reflection of the confidence that we have in Staffordshire. "We're very much focused on the spine of the country and Staffordshire is the central part of that spine."
- **£100 million investment in Staffordshire unveiled by JCB**
  JCB is marking its 80th birthday with news of a £100 million investment in ultra-modern manufacturing facilities at its global headquarters in Staffordshire. The project at the company's plant in Rocester, Staffordshire, will see the installation of a fully automated powder paint plant costing £60 million as well as a full modernisation of the shop floor, with new machining centres, friction welders, and cylinder boring machines.

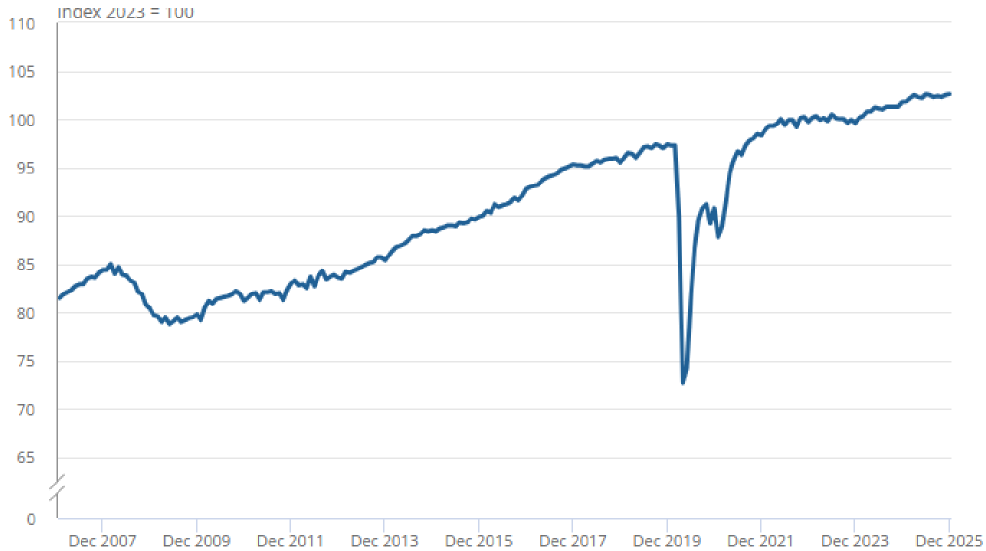
National Context

- **The UK economy in early 2026 is experiencing slow growth,** with modest GDP growth and facing challenges like low business investment and a weakening labour market, while inflation has slightly dipped in January and is expected to fall further in 2026, paving the way for potential interest rate cuts later in the year.
- **Looking forwards 2026 is expected to be less volatile than previous years, with potential, though modest, economic recovery.**

Economy

- **The economy grew by 0.1% in the last three months of the year**, which was slightly slower than economists had expected. The ONS said the overall picture for growth towards the end of the year remained "subdued."
- This follows a fall of 0.1% in the three months to November, and a fall of 0.1% in the three months to October 2025.

GDP Monthly index, January 2007 to December 2025, UK



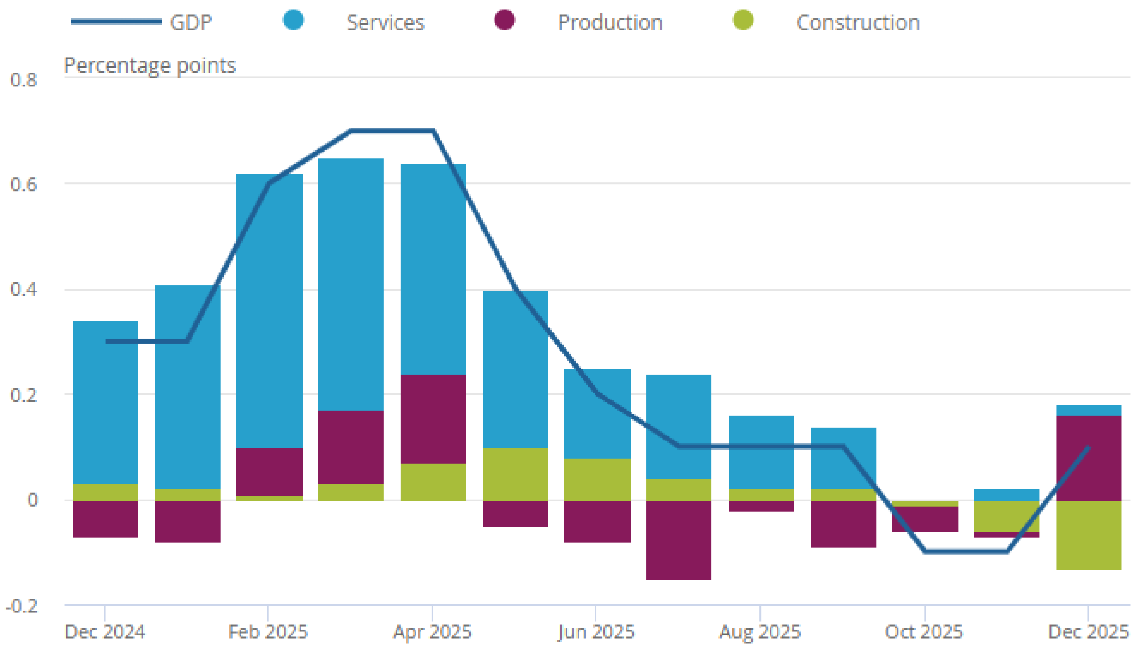
Source: Gross domestic product (GDP) monthly estimate from the Office for National Statistics

- **Services output showed no growth**, after also showing no growth in the three months to November 2025.
- **Production output grew by 1.2%**; this follows a fall of 0.1% in the three months to November 2025.
- **Construction output fell by 2.1%**, following a fall of 0.9% in the three months to November 2025; this continues a pattern of slowing growth in the three-monthly measure since May 2025 and is the lowest reading in the three-monthly growth since September 2021.

In the month to December 2025:

- **Monthly GDP is estimated to have grown by 0.1%,** following a growth of 0.2% in November 2025 and a fall of 0.1% in October 2025.
- Services grew by 0.3%; however, production fell by 0.9% and construction fell by 0.5% in December 2025.

Contributions to three-month GDP growth, December 2024 to December 2025, UK

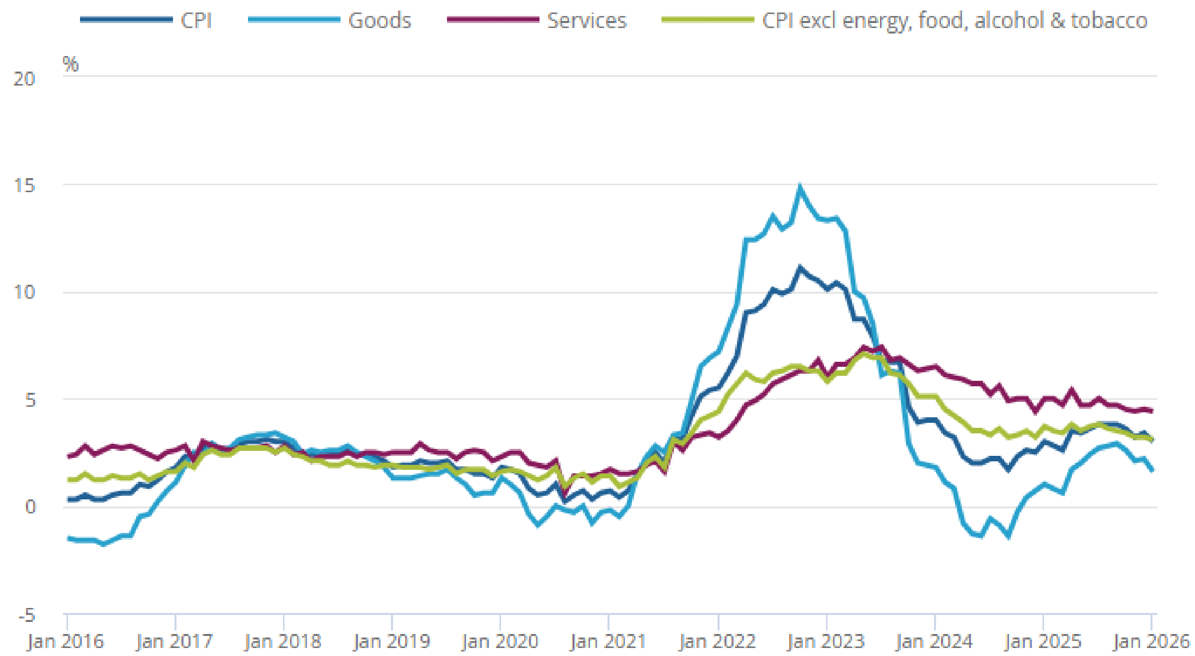


Source: Gross domestic product (GDP) monthly estimate from the Office for National Statistics

Cost of Living

- **The consumer price index measure of inflation dropped to 3 per cent in the year to January**, down from 3.4 per cent in the 12 months to December 2025. The fall in inflation, combined with jobs data showing unemployment at a near five-year high and wage increases slowing, has reportedly increased the likelihood of an interest rate cut by the Bank of England in March.
- Transport, and food and non-alcoholic beverages made the largest downward contributions to the change in inflation.
- **The rate of inflation remains well above the Bank of England's 2 per cent target**.

CPI goods, services and core annual inflation rates, UK, January 2016 to January 2026



Source: Consumer price inflation from the Office for National Statistics

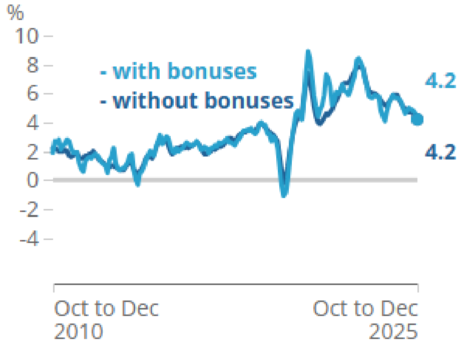
- **Wage growth continues to slow. Annual growth in employees' average earnings in Great Britain was 4.2% for both regular earnings (excluding bonuses) and total earnings (including bonuses) in October to December 2025.** Annual average regular earnings growth was 7.2% for the public sector and 3.4% for the private sector. The public sector annual growth rate is affected by some public sector pay rises being paid earlier in 2025 than in 2024. This has caused a base effect that reached its peak last month and will phase out over the next few periods.
- **Annual growth in real terms, adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH), was 0.5% for both regular pay and total pay in October to December 2025.**
- **Annual growth in real terms, adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Prices Index excluding owner occupiers' housing costs (CPI), was 0.8% for regular pay and 0.7% for total pay in October to December 2025.**

Nominal Earnings

Average Weekly Earnings annual growth rates - nominal pay

The nominal annual growth rate for both regular and total pay was down on the previous period.

Source: Monthly Wages and Salaries Survey from the Office for National Statistics

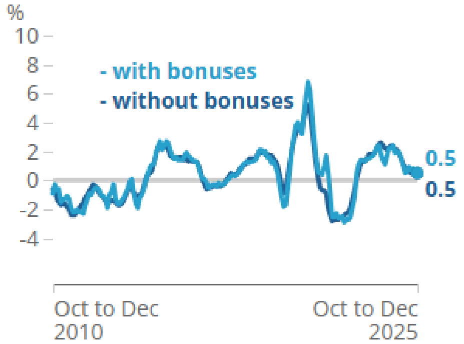


Real Earnings CPIH

Average Weekly Earnings annual growth rates - real pay (using CPIH)

The real annual growth rate for both regular and total pay was down on the previous period.

Source: Monthly Wages and Salaries Survey from the Office for National Statistics

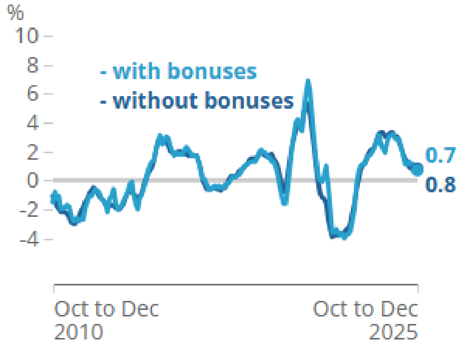


Real Earnings CPI

Average Weekly Earnings annual growth rates - real pay (using CPI)

The real annual growth rate for both regular and total pay was down on the previous period.

Source: Monthly Wages and Salaries Survey from the Office for National Statistics



- There were an estimated 118,000 working days lost because of labour disputes across the UK in December 2025, with over two-thirds of working days lost in the health and social work sector because of the doctors' strikes in England.

Business Conditions

- The latest results from Wave 150 of the **Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS)**, which was live from 2 to 15 February 2026, suggest that business conditions continue to be challenging but with some signs of increased optimism.
- Nearly a third (31%) of trading businesses reported that their **turnover had decreased in January 2026** compared with the previous month, which is broadly stable with December 2025, but has increased by 3 percentage points compared with January 2025; in contrast, 16% reported that their **turnover had increased**, up 3 percentage points from December 2025.
- Around one in eight (13%) trading businesses **expect their turnover to decrease in March**

2026, which is 7 percentage points down compared with February 2026, and the same proportion as March 2025; 21% of trading businesses reported that they **expect their turnover to increase in March 2026**, up 6 percentage points compared with expectations for February 2026.

- **Economic uncertainty remained the most reported challenge affecting turnover for trading businesses in early February 2026**, at 30%, which is broadly stable compared with early January 2026; the **most reported challenge for businesses with 10 or more employees was cost of labour** (36%), which was also broadly stable over the same period.
- Over a quarter (28%) of trading businesses reported an **increase in the prices of goods or services bought in January 2026** compared with the previous month, which was the highest proportion reported since April 2025; 12% reported an **increase in the prices of goods or services sold**, which was also the highest proportion reported since April 2025.
- Around one in six (17%) trading businesses **expect the prices of goods or services they sell to increase in March 2026**; this is down 3 percentage points from expectations for February 2026, but was broadly stable compared with March 2025.
- 16% of businesses with 10 or more employees reported that they were **experiencing worker shortages** in early February 2026; this proportion has been broadly stable since October 2025.
- The latest business insolvencies data shows that **in January 2026 there were a total of 1,614 company insolvencies in England and Wales, 17% lower than the number registered in the previous year (1,937 in January 2025), and 4% lower than the number registered three years previously (1,685 in January 2023).** The main concern around company and individual insolvencies are associated issues such as mental health and homelessness.

Labour Market

- The following charts shows the latest **labour market position** and the latest Office for National Statistics data:

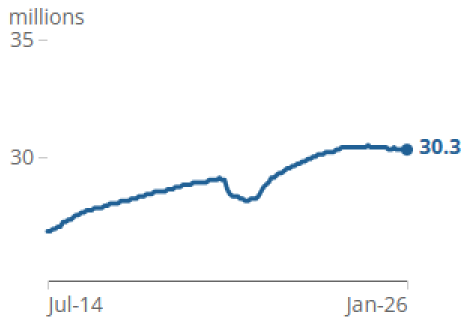
Payrolled employees
The number of payrolled employees

Monthly change: ▼ -11,000
Annual change: ▼ -134,000

The number of payrolled employees is largely unchanged in the latest two months.

The January 2026 estimate should be treated as a provisional estimate and is likely to be revised when more data are received next month.

Source: Pay As You Earn Real Time Information from HM Revenue and Customs



Employment rate

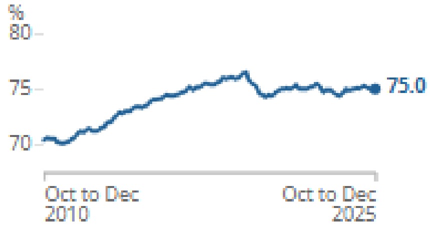
Employment rate (all aged 16 to 64)

Quarterly change: ▼-0.1pps
Since Dec-Feb 2020: ▼-1.5pps

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

Note: Because of increased volatility of Labour Force Survey estimates, resulting from smaller achieved sample sizes, estimates of change should be treated with additional caution.

Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics



Unemployment rate

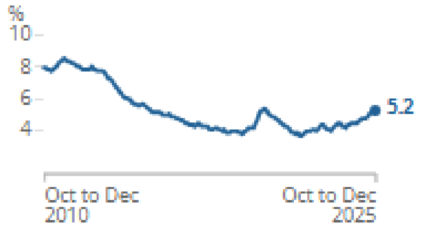
Unemployment rate (all aged 16+)

Quarterly change: ▲0.2pps
Since Dec-Feb 2020: ▲1.3pps

The unemployment rate is up on the quarter and the year, and is above pre-coronavirus pandemic rates.

Note: Because of increased volatility of Labour Force Survey estimates, resulting from smaller achieved sample sizes, estimates of change should be treated with additional caution.

Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics



Inactivity rate

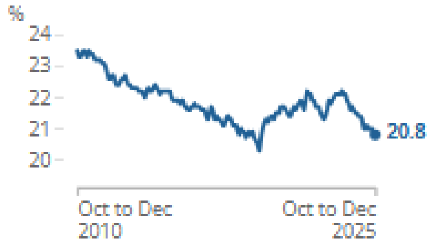
Economic inactivity rate (all aged 16 to 64)

Quarterly change: ▼-0.1pps
Since Dec-Feb 2020: ▲0.5pps

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

Note: Because of increased volatility of Labour Force Survey estimates, resulting from smaller achieved sample sizes, estimates of change should be treated with additional caution.

Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics

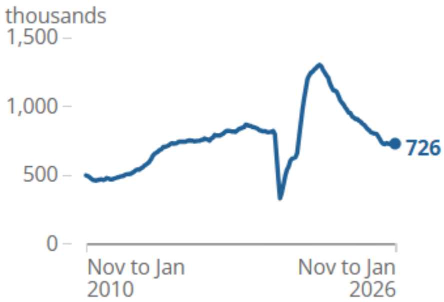


Job vacancies
Number of job vacancies

Quarterly change: ▲2,000
Annual change: ▼ -73,000

Vacancies have been broadly flat across recent periods

Source: Vacancy Survey from the Office for National Statistics



- **Estimates for payrolled employees in the UK fell by 121,000 (0.4%) between December 2024 and December 2025, and decreased by 6,000 (0.0%) between November 2025 and December 2025.** This is based administrative data from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC).
- When looking at October to December 2025, the period comparable with our Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates, the number of payrolled employees fell by 130,000 (0.4%) over the year and by 46,000 (0.2%) over the quarter.
- The early estimate of payrolled employees for January 2026 decreased by 134,000 (0.4%) on the year, and by 11,000 (0.0%) on the month, to 30.3 million. The January 2026 estimate should be treated as a provisional estimate and is likely to be revised when more data are received next month.
- Estimates from January to March 2025 include the full effect of the improvements in LFS data collection and sampling methods introduced from January 2024. However, since then, ONS has increased the number of interviewers for the LFS, which has continued to increase the number of responses to the survey. Consequently, estimates may be subject to the effect of these further improvements, which may have an ongoing impact on the survey. An increased volatility will remain in the LFS estimates for mid-2023 and throughout 2024, so ONS would advise additional caution when interpreting survey change measures.
- ONS recommends using LFS estimates as part of our suite of labour market indicators, alongside workforce jobs, Claimant Count and Pay As You Earn (PAYE) Real Time Information (RTI) estimates.
- The **UK employment rate** based on the LFS for people aged 16 to 64 years was estimated at 75.0% in October to December 2025. This is down in the latest quarter, but unchanged on estimates of a year ago.
- The **UK unemployment rate** for people aged 16 years and over was estimated at 5.2% in October to December 2025. This is up in the latest quarter and above estimates of a year ago. The latest unemployment rate is a five-year high.
- The **UK economic inactivity rate** for people aged 16 to 64 years was estimated at 20.8% in October to December 2025. This is down in the latest quarter and below estimates of a year ago.
- The **UK Claimant Count** for January 2026 increased on the month but decreased on the

year to an estimated 1.691 million. The Claimant Count figure for the latest month is provisional and is subject to revisions after first publication. This is the result of later amendments to records in the administrative systems, for example as work capability assessments conclude and more information is available about benefit claimants' ability to work. Revisions in recent months have tended to be made downwards.

- The estimated number of **vacancies in the UK** has remained broadly flat across recent periods. Early estimates in November 2025 to January 2026 suggest a small increase of 2,000 (0.3%), to 726,000, compared with August to October 2025.

Conclusion

- In conclusion, **the economy continues to see slow growth**, with the construction sector significantly struggling. There is hope that throughout 2026 the economy may see improved stability and some growth but this is likely to be limited.
- It is positive that **inflation has dropped closer to the Bank of England's target** and alongside unemployment rising and wage growth slowing, may pave the way for an interest rate cut in March which will be welcomed by businesses and people struggling with costs.
- Alongside **continuing global uncertainty and the introduction of new business-related UK taxes**, many businesses also have ongoing concerns around **longer-term issues including high interest rates and energy prices, increased commodity costs, wage pressures, supply-chain constraints, lower consumer confidence,** and **some labour market challenges**. Although there are some signs of increased optimism as we move further into 2026.
- The **labour market continues to loosen, with payrolled employees declining and unemployment rising,** the latter partly driven by people moving from being economically inactive. **This all comes at a time when job vacancies have seen a long-term decline**, with the **challenging economic conditions meaning more businesses have reduced recruitment and made redundancies, therefore it will be more challenging for those looking for work to find work**.
- We need to continue to **support those still struggling with the cost-of-living, residents to transition into work and viable businesses to survive and grow**.
- **In Staffordshire we have a confident, diverse, and robust economy,** demonstrated by the improvement and recovery witnessed since the pandemic. 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 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 Jobs and Careers Brokerage 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. We are also delivering the new **Connect to Work programmes** which forms a fundamental part of our Get Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Working Plan.

- Alongside this, skills provision, such as the new Institute of Technology, has a significant 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.

Data Deep Dives:

Business and Individual Insolvencies

This section covers the latest Insolvency Service monthly insolvency statistics[1] for January 2026, which shows the number of new companies and individuals who are unable to pay debts and enter a formal insolvency procedure.

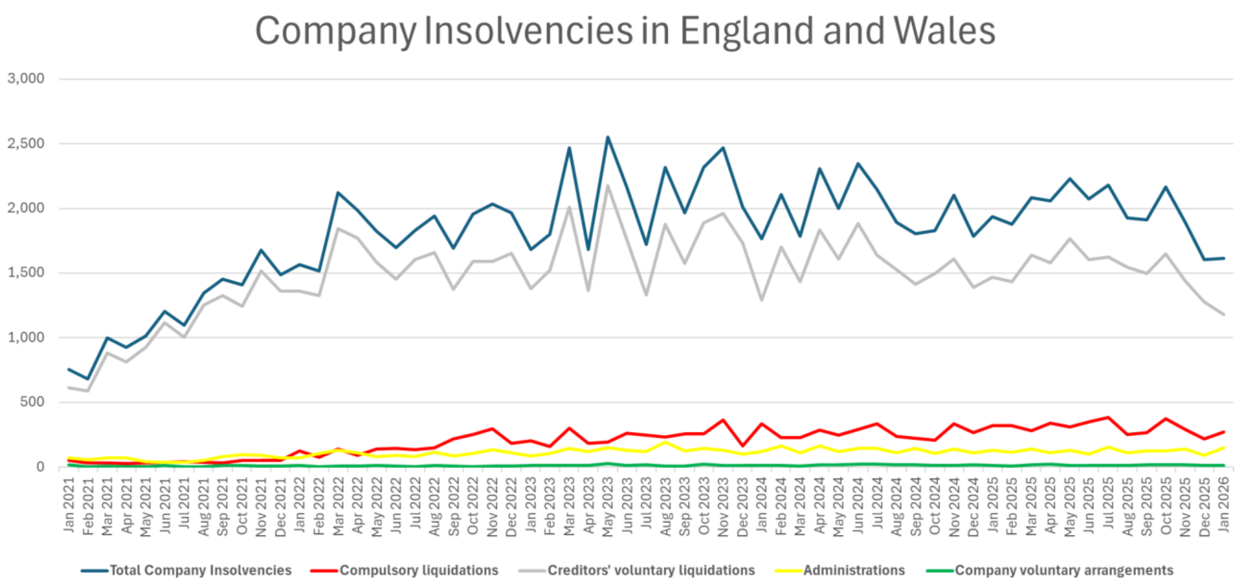
Company Insolvencies

In January 2026 there were a total of 1,614 company insolvencies in England and Wales. The overall number of **company insolvencies are 17% lower than the number registered in the previous year (1,937 in January 2025), and 4% lower than the number registered three years previously (1,685 in January 2023).** 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 272 compulsory liquidations in January 2026, 16% lower than the number in January 2025, but 33% higher than in January 2023. It is important to note numbers of compulsory liquidations have increased from historical lows during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, partly as a result of the increase in winding-up petitions presented by HMRC.

In January 2026 there were 1,179 Creditors' Voluntary Liquidations (CVLs), 20% lower than January 2025, and 15% lower than January 2023. Numbers of administrations are 73% higher than three years previously in January 2023, Company Voluntary Arrangements (CVAs) are 7% lower than three years previously in January 2023, and numbers are low.

Company insolvencies between February 2025 and January 2026 are 2% lower compared to a year earlier, representing 435 fewer businesses



Source: Insolvency Service (compulsory liquidations only); Companies House (all other insolvency types)[1]

[1]*Source: The Insolvency Service –*[Company insolvencies, January 2026 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

The sectors to have seen the largest number of company insolvencies between January 2025 and December 2026 continue to be the Construction sector (3,931), Wholesale & Retail sector (3,728), and Accommodation & Food Service sector (3,353). Levels are below those seen for the same period the previous year for the Construction sector -3% lower, but higher for the Wholesale & Retail sector +4% higher, and the Accommodation & Food sector is -3% lower than levels a year earlier. Overall, for this period company insolvencies by industry are 0.2% higher.

Individual Insolvencies

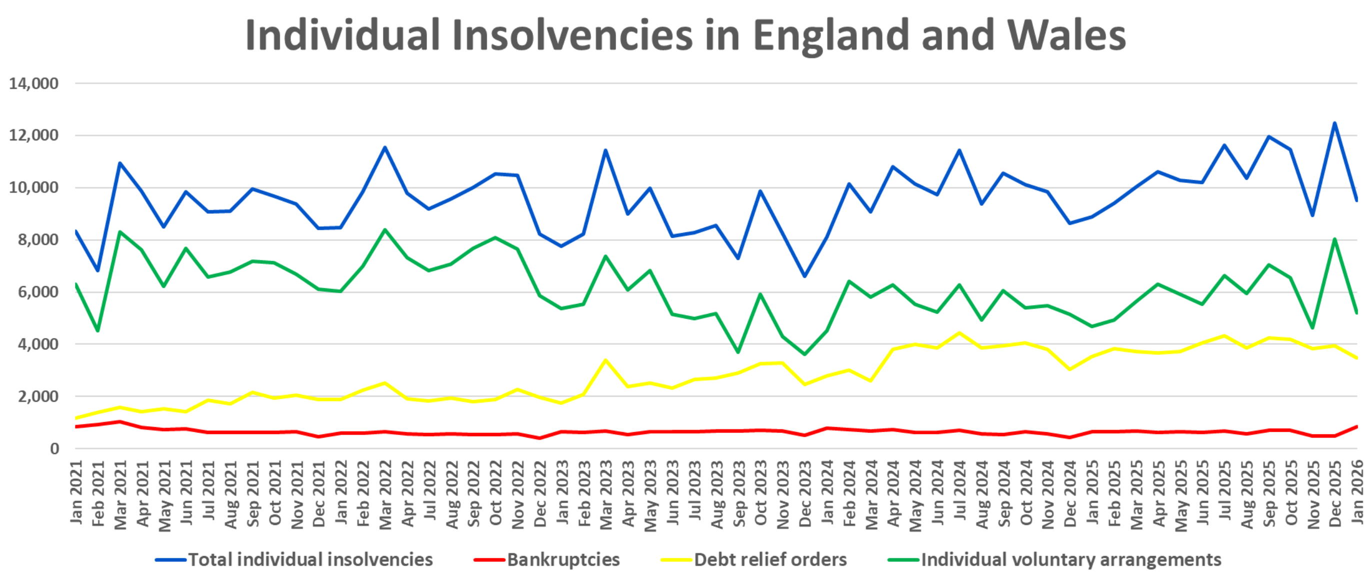
There were **9,524 total individual insolvencies in January 2026**, which was 7% higher than in January 2025, and 23% higher than in January 2023.

For individuals, **829 bankruptcies were registered in January 2026**, 25% higher than in January 2025, and 29% higher than in January 2023.

There were **3,483 Debt Relief Orders (DROs) in January 2026**, 1% lower than in January 2025, and 100% higher than in January 2023.

There were **5,212 Individual Voluntary Arrangements (IVAs) registered in January 2026**, which was 11% higher than in January 2025, and 3% lower than in January 2023.

Total Individual Insolvencies between February 2025 and January 2026 are 7% higher than the same period a year earlier, representing an increase of 8,197.



Source: Insolvency Service

There were **5,008 Breathing Space registrations in January 2026, which is 39% lower than the number registered in January 2025**. 4,900 were Standard Breathing Space registrations, which is 40% lower and 108 were Mental Health Breathing Space registrations, which is 20% higher than January 2025.

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 and individual voluntary arrangements remain lower, 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 Count[2]

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: January 2026

Area	Claimant Count Rate (January 2025)	Claimant Count Rate (December 2025)	Claimant Count Rate[1] (January 2026)	Number of Claimants (January 2026)	Annual Change in Claimants (Numbers)	Annual Change in Claimants (%)
England	4.0	3.9	4.0	1,463,375	-24,075	-1.6%
West Midlands	5.3	5.1	5.2	197,620	-5,330	-2.6%
Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent	3.5	3.3	3.4	24,055	-1,090	-4.3%
Birmingham	10.1	9.8	9.9	76,190	-1,380	-1.8%
Wolverhampton	7.1	6.5	6.6	11,620	-845	-6.8%
Sandwell	6.8	6.5	6.5	14,575	-745	-4.9%
Walsall	5.9	5.5	5.6	10,235	-515	-4.8%
Coventry	5.4	5.3	5.4	13,175	130	1.0%
Stoke-on-Trent	**5.8**	**5.2**	**5.3**	**9,010**	**-785**	**-8.0%**
Dudley	4.9	4.5	4.7	9,380	-410	-4.2%
Telford and Wrekin	3.7	3.7	3.7	4,540	-10	-0.2%
Solihull	3.5	3.5	3.6	4,665	30	0.6%
Worcestershire	3.1	2.9	3.0	11,010	-410	-3.6%
Warwickshire	2.7	2.7	2.8	10,825	385	3.7%
Staffordshire	**2.8**	**2.7**	**2.7**	**15,045**	**-310**	**-2.0%**
Herefordshire, County of	2.7	2.4	2.6	2,790	-185	-6.2%
Shropshire	2.5	2.3	2.4	4,565	-270	-5.6%
East Staffordshire	3.5	3.2	3.4	2,730	-65	-2.3%
Tamworth	3.1	3.1	3.2	1,590	15	1.0%
Cannock Chase	3.2	3.0	3.0	1,955	-110	-5.3%
Newcastle-under-Lyme	3.0	2.8	2.9	2,310	-55	-2.3%
South Staffordshire	2.5	2.5	2.6	1,745	55	3.3%
Stafford	2.5	2.3	2.4	2,055	-20	-1.0%
Lichfield	2.3	2.2	2.2	1,470	-40	-2.6%
Staffordshire Moorlands	2.3	2.1	2.1	1,190	-85	-6.7%

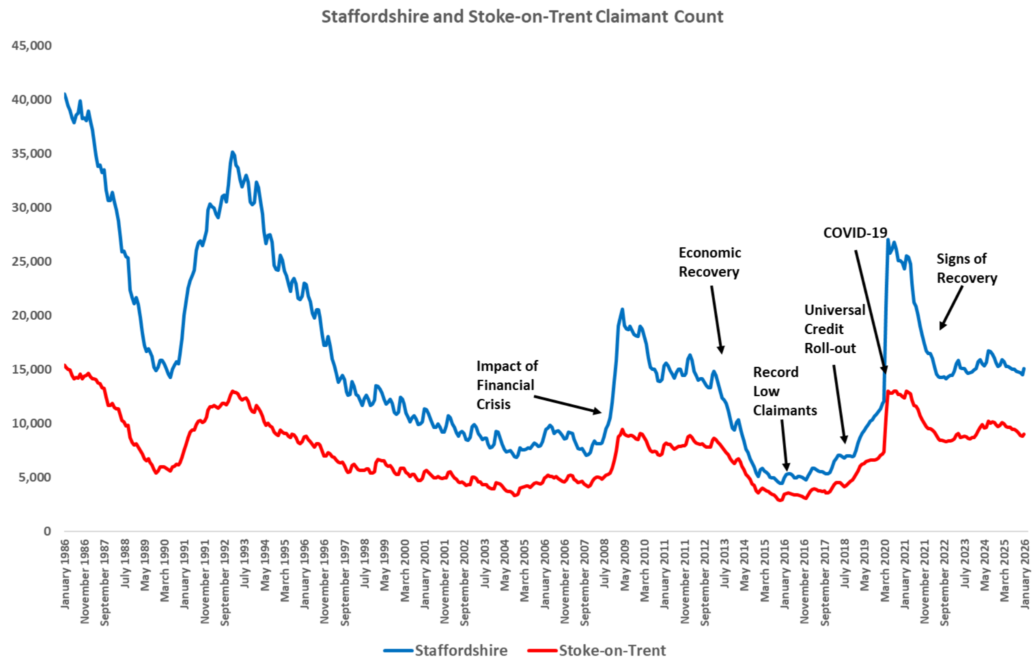
[1] The claimant rate is the proportion of the working age population claiming Universal Credit

- The **claimant count in Staffordshire currently stands at 15,045 this is 310 fewer claimants than at the same time last year.** This is equivalent to a -2.0% annual reduction which is slightly lower than the reduction seen regionally (-2.6%) but a higher decrease than nationally (-1.6%)

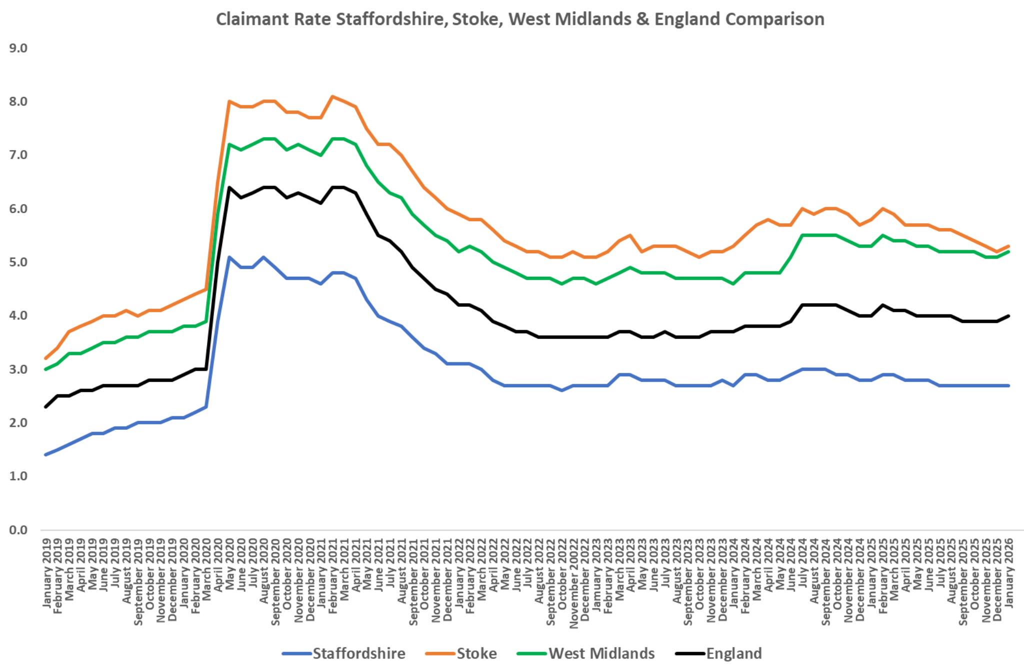
- The **claimant rate in Staffordshire is currently 2.7%** of the working age population, which is **lower than the 2.8% rate seen a year earlier.**

- The number of **claimants in Stoke-on-Trent stands at 9,010**, which is 785 lower than a year earlier, and the **claimant rate has decreased from 5.8% the previous year to 5.3%.**

[2] *Source: https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/*



- The **rate in Staffordshire continues to be one of the lowest in the West Midlands and is far lower than the average for the region 5.2% which decreased from 5.3% the previous year, and lower than the average for England of 4.0% which has remained the same as the previous year**.



- **It is important to note that not all claimants will be out of work and should 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.

- **The majority of Staffordshire districts have seen a decline in the number of claimants over the last year except for South Staffordshire and Tamworth which saw an increase**.

- **All districts have a lower claimant rate than both the regional and national rates**. The highest claimant rate at 3.4 is in East Staffordshire. Staffordshire Moorlands has the lowest claimant rate of 2.1%.

- We will continue to support those residents that unfortunately find themselves out of work to access employment through our partnership working and Jobs Brokerage service.

Youth Claimant Count

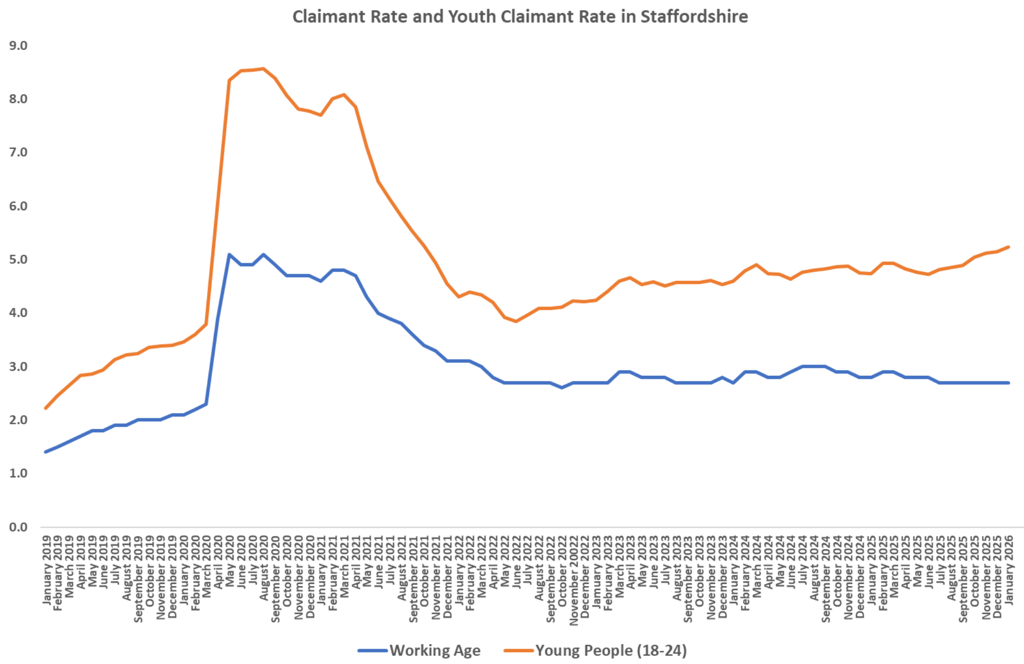
Youth Claimant Count (Universal Credit) Statistics: January 2026

Area	Youth Claimant Count Rate (January 2025)	Youth Claimant Count Rate (December 2025)	Youth Claimant Count Rate[1] (January 2026)	Number of Youth Claimants (January 2026)	Annual Change in Youth Claimants (Numbers)	Annual Change in Youth Claimants (%)
England	5.2	5.7	5.7	281,450	25,440	9.9%
West Midlands	7.1	7.7	7.8	41,090	3,735	10.0%
Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent	5.6	5.9	6.0	5,170	365	7.6%
Birmingham	9.6	10.8	10.7	15,495	1,630	11.8%
Wolverhampton	9.8	10.1	10.3	2,345	100	4.5%
Wallsall	9.3	10.0	10.2	2,430	215	9.7%
Sandwell	9.2	9.7	9.7	2,985	160	5.7%
Dudley	8.0	8.6	8.7	2,095	170	8.8%
Stoke-on-Trent	**7.7**	**7.8**	**8.0**	**1,890**	**55**	**3.0%**
Solihull	6.3	7.5	7.5	1,095	165	17.7%
Telford and Wrekin	6.3	6.8	6.9	1,055	90	9.3%
Coventry	4.9	5.6	5.6	2,630	315	13.6%
Worcestershire	5.0	5.2	5.4	2,215	140	6.7%
Staffordshire	**4.7**	**5.1**	**5.2**	**3,280**	**310**	**10.4%**
Herefordshire, County of	4.1	4.7	4.9	540	85	18.7%
Warwickshire	4.1	4.7	4.8	2,145	300	16.3%
Shropshire	4.3	4.3	4.4	895	10	1.1%
Tamworth	6.7	6.9	6.9	375	10	2.7%
Cannock Chase	6.4	6.5	6.5	450	10	2.3%
South Staffordshire	4.7	5.9	5.9	405	80	24.6%
East Staffordshire	5.0	5.2	5.5	480	45	10.3%
Stafford	4.7	5.2	5.3	435	50	13.0%
Lichfield	4.3	4.5	4.5	320	15	4.9%
Staffordshire Moorlands	3.8	4.0	4.3	245	30	14.0%
Newcastle-under-Lyme	3.7	4.1	4.1	565	65	13.0%

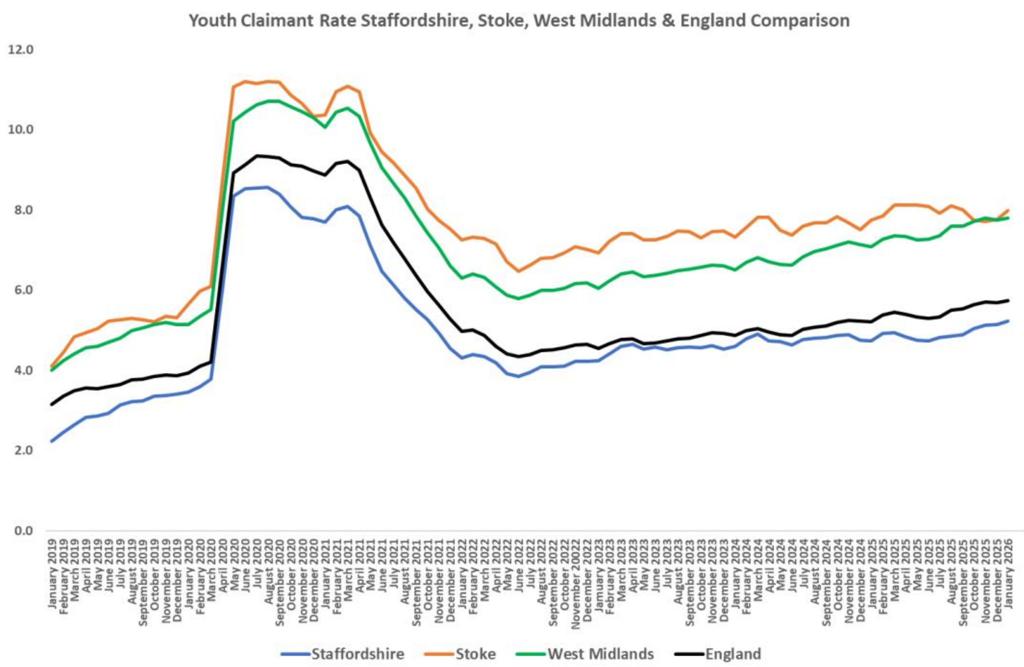
[1] The claimant rate is the proportion of the working age population claiming Universal Credit

- The **youth claimant count in Staffordshire currently stands at 3,280 this is 310 more youth claimants than at the same time last year.** This is equivalent to an 10.4% annual increase, which is slightly higher than the increases seen both regionally (10.0%) and nationally (9.9%).

- The **youth claimant rate in Staffordshire is currently 5.2% of the 18-24 population, an increase from 4.7% a year earlier.** It is a concerning trend seen regionally and nationally.



- The number of **youth claimants in Stoke-on-Trent stands at 1,890**, which is 55 higher than a year earlier, with **the rate at 8.0%, increasing from 7.7% a year earlier.**
- It is important to note that **Staffordshire continues to be lower than the national rate of 5.7%, which increased from 5.2% and far lower than the regional rate of 7.8% which increased from 7.1% over the past year**.



- **All districts in Staffordshire have seen increases in the number of youth claimants over the last year**.

- **It is important to note that all Staffordshire districts have a youth claimant rate below the regional average, but Tamworth, Cannock Chase and South Staffordshire have rates above the national average**.

- Our focus continues to be to engage with our younger residents and support them to find employment or to continue in education and training, such as through the Staffordshire Jobs and Careers Brokerage service, the Connect to Work Scheme, and the new Skills Bootcamps to help prevent them becoming long-term unemployed.

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

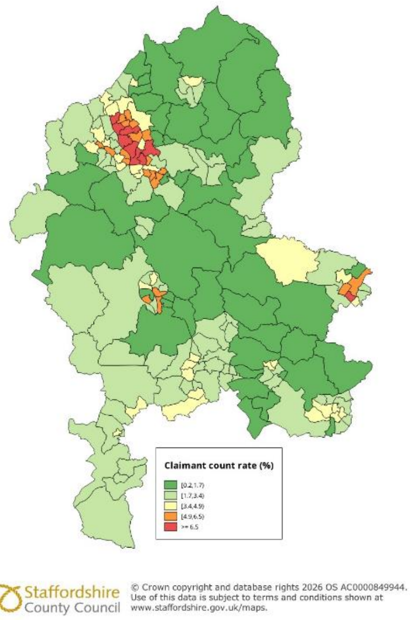
The following summaries and maps provide the latest breakdown of the claimant count by wards in Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent. Please note that due to geographical changes in ward data from Nomis/ONS (17 Feb 2026), comparative annual data is not available.

Claimant Count Rate January 2026

Of the 185 wards in Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent, 41 were above the England average of 4.0% for the number of claimants as a proportion of the working age population.

Within the twenty highest claimant rate wards, sixteen were in Stoke-on-Trent with the highest rates in Burslem: 8.2%/415; Etruria & Hanley: 8.2%/425; Hanley Park, Joiner's Square & Shelton: 7.4%/915; Tunstall: 7.4%/355; Moorcroft & Sneyd Green: 6.9%/500 claimants.

In Staffordshire, three wards in East Staffs had the highest claimant rate, Anglesey: 7.0%/410; Burton & Eton:6.2%/465; Shobnall: 6.0%/345; and Knutton (Newcastle): 6.3%/120 claimants.

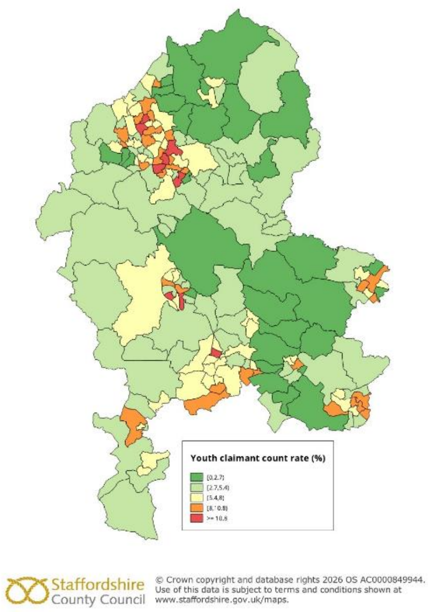


Youth Claimant Count Rate January 2026

Of the 185 wards in Staffordshire & Stoke-Trent, 84 were above the England average 5.7% for the number of claimants aged 18-24 a proportion of the 18-24 population.

Of the ten wards with the highest youth claimant count rate, seven were in Stoke-on-Trent including Meir South: 11.6%/60; Fenton East: 11.3%/55; Bentilee, Ubberley & Townsend: 11.0%/125; Burslem: 10.9%/80; Little Chell & Stanfield: 10.9%/60.

In Staffordshire, the wards with the highest claimant rate were Penkside (Stafford): 13.5/30; Highfields & Western Downs (Stafford): 11.7%/55; Chadsmoor (Cannock): 11.1%/80.

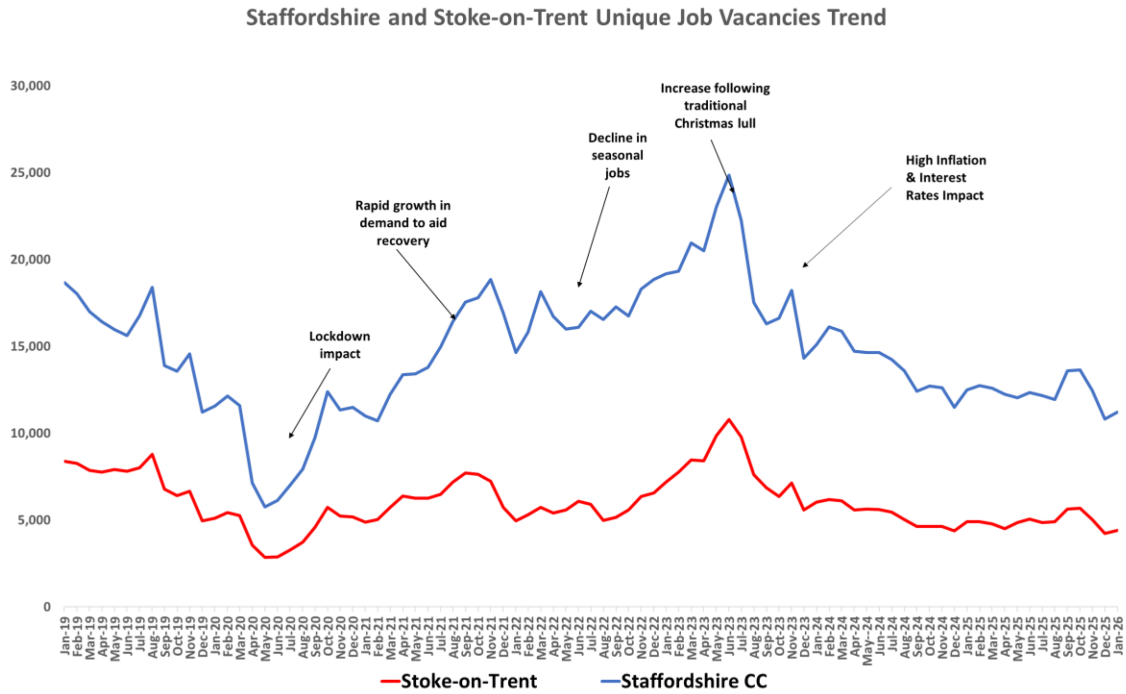


Job Vacancies[3]

- **Staffordshire saw a 10% decrease in the number of available job vacancies between January 2025 and January 2026, higher than the decrease seen regionally and nationally to a total of 11,200[4]. Job vacancies in Staffordshire are lower than the number of work-related benefit claimants. Stoke-on-Trent saw a 10% decrease in job vacancies over the past year to a total of 4,400 which is significantly lower than the number of claimants.**

- **Across the region over the past year there was a 7% decrease, and nationally there was a 6% decrease in the number of job vacancies.**

- The chart below indicates a general declining trend overall since July 2023 suggesting a slowdown in the jobs market, at least in part due to business sectors delaying recruitment because of increased costs and uncertainty in the economy. Our focus continues to be to support those that unfortunately find themselves unemployed, to transition into work.



Important to note that Lightcast live job vacancy data has been upgraded and improved through enhanced AI deduplication and sharper skill scraping of job postings.

Annual Trends in recruitment

- The majority of occupational groups saw a decrease in vacancies over the past year. However, 'Process, Plant & Machine Operatives' occupations increased +1% whilst 'Administrative & Secretarial' occupations saw a decrease of -21%.

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[3] Source: Lightcast

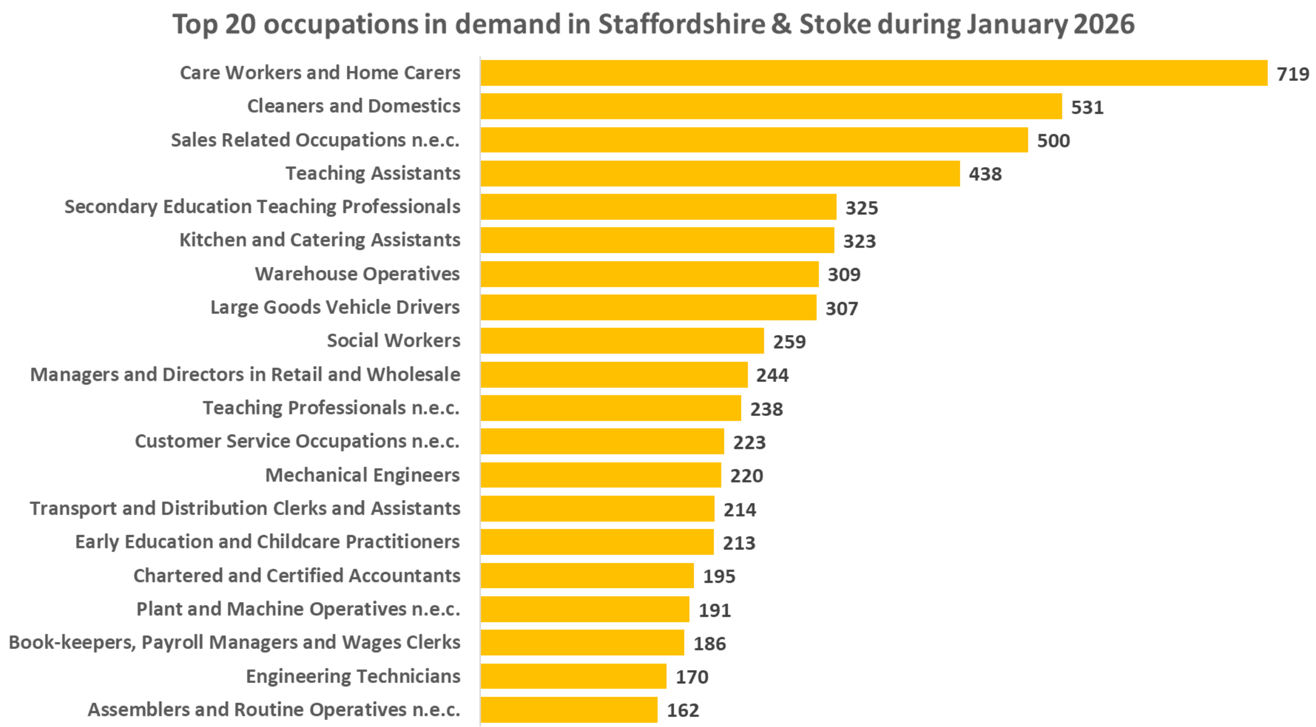
[4] Lightcast upgraded its location coding process for UK job postings on 19 February 2024. As a result of this change, historic posting counts are estimated to have annual changes of -0.5 to -1% in 2018-19 & 2021; +1%-2% 2020 & 2022-2024.

- The occupations to see the largest year-on-year increases include Mechanical Engineers; Assemblers & Routine Operatives; Early Education & Childcare Practitioners; Transport & Distribution Clerks & Assistants; Road Transport Drivers; Project Support Officers; Managers in Storage & Warehousing; Catering & Bar Managers; Quality Control & Planning Engineers; Plant & Machine Operatives; Sales Accounts & Business Development Managers; Electrical Engineers; FE Teaching Professionals; Engineering Technicians; Speech & Language Therapists; Restaurant & Catering Managers & Proprietors; Chefs; School Crossing Patrol; Management Consultants & Business Analysts; CAD, Drawing & Architectural Technicians.

- The occupations to see the largest year-on-year decrease include Book-Keepers, Payroll Managers & Wages Clerks; SEND Teaching Professionals; Teaching Professionals; Sales Related; Social Workers; Vehicle Technicians, Mechanics & Electricians; Care Workers & Home Carers; Customer Service; Other Registered Nursing Professionals; Receptionists; Secondary Education Teaching Professionals; Elementary Construction; Solicitors & Lawyers; Taxation Experts; Early Education & Childcare Assistants; Buyers & Procurement Officers; Merchandisers; HR & IR Officers; Personal Assistants & Other Secretaries; Health Care Practice Managers.

Top Occupations in Demand

- Considering the **top 20 job vacancy occupations in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent**, **'Care Workers & Home Carers'** roles are the most in demand occupations.
- The following occupations **'Cleaners & Domestics,' 'Sales Related'** and **'Teaching Assistants'** also have strong demand.
- In the Education sector there is particularly high demand for **'Secondary Education Teaching Professionals'** and **'Teaching Professionals.'**
- In the Hospitality sector **'Kitchen & Catering Assistants'** are most in demand.
- The Logistics sector continues to have high demand for **'Warehouse Operatives,' 'Large Goods Vehicle Drivers'** and **'Transport & Distribution Clerks & Assistants.'**
- There is high demand in the Health & Social Care sector for **'Social Workers.'**
- Demand for **'Managers & Directors'** in the Retail and Wholesale sector remain strong.
- There is strong demand for **'Customer Service'** and **'Bookkeepers, Payroll Managers & Wages Clerks'** occupations across business sectors.
- There is continued demand in the Engineering sector for **'Mechanical Engineers' 'Plant & Machine operatives,'** and **'Engineering Technicians.'**
- There is also high demand for **'Early Education and Childcare Practitioners.'**
- In the Financial sector **'Chartered & Certified Accountants'** are in demand.
- There is also strong demand for **'Assemblers & Routine Operatives.'**



- 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 Connect to Work 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 the digital economy (including online retail and e-commerce), construction sector (including retrofitting**

homes), the car industry e.g. electric cars at Jaguar Land Rover, and in manufacturing e.g. hydrogen combustion technology at 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. **Advanced logistics** within the ecommerce sector continues to drive demand, evidenced by Pets At Home in Stafford recently generating over 750 new jobs and Carlsberg Britvic investing £4 million in a new depot, with plans to create several hundred additional jobs.