Staffordshire County Council

Staffordshire Means Business

Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Economic Bulletin

Issue 70 - June 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 we are **starting to see a rise in the Claimant Count**, although the rate remains broadly comparable with the level recorded a year ago. At the same time, we have **seen job vacancy levels in the local economy ease, with the overall trend becoming flatter** and reflecting the challenging economic climate.
- During these challenging times **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 15,270, this is 5 more claimants than at the same time last year.** Staffordshire has seen no change proportionately, which is lower than the increase seen nationally (+0.8%) and slightly higher than regionally (-0.2%).
- The **claimant rate in Staffordshire is currently 2.8%** of the working age population, which has **remained unchanged since last year.**
- **Staffordshire continues to have one of the lowest claimant rates in the region, far lower than the regional average 5.3% which has remained unchanged since the previous year, and lower than the England average of 4.1% which has increased from 4.0% since 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 3,310, this is 325 more youth claimants than at the same time last year.** This is equivalent to an 10.9% annual increase, which is slightly higher than the increases seen both regionally (10.3%) and nationally (9.7%).
- The **youth claimant rate in Staffordshire is currently 5.3% of the 18-24 population, which is an increase from 4.8% 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 5.8%, which increased from 5.3% and far lower than the regional rate of 8.0% which increased from 7.3%** 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 1% increase in the number of available job vacancies between May 2025 and May 2026 to a total of 12,200. This is lower than the number of work-related benefit claimants in Staffordshire. Stoke-on-Trent saw a negligible change in job vacancies to a total of 4,900 which is significantly lower than the number of claimants. Across the region in the past year there was a**

1% increase, and nationally there was a 4% increase 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, **'Sales Related,' 'Large Goods Vehicle Drivers' and 'Teaching Assistants'** show continued recruitment demand.
- Within the Education sector, vacancy levels remain elevated for **'Secondary Education Teaching Professionals,' 'SEND Teaching Professionals,' 'Teaching Professionals'** and **'Primary Education Teaching Professionals.'**
- Vacancy demand also remains strong for **'Cleaners and Domestics.'**
- In the Hospitality sector, **'Kitchen & Catering Assistants'** and **'Chefs'** remain key occupations for recruitment.
- In the Retail and Wholesale sector, **'Managers & Directors'** and **'Sales & Retail Assistants'** continue to attract strong employer demand.
- The Logistics sector continues to have strong demand for **'Warehouse Operatives.'**
- Across business sectors **'Customer Service Occupations'** and **'Book-keepers, Payroll Managers & Wages Clerks'** continue to attract sustained demand.
- There is also notable demand for **'Early Education & Childcare Practitioners.'**
- The Health & Social Care sector continues to have sustained demand for **'Social Workers.'**
- In the Engineering sector **'Plant & Machine Operatives'** remain sought after.
- Demand for **'Vehicle Mechanics and Electricians'** in the Motor Trade are also high.
- 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.
- A successful county council business support programme which helped over 80 new enterprises to grow and thrive during its first year has launched its latest phase. Small businesses which have been operating for between two and five years can benefit from free expert guidance through the **Growth Ladder programme**. It offers one-to-one advisor sessions which will assess business needs, create a bespoke action plan for growth, and then provide ongoing check-ins to help stay on track or adjust the plan. The latest round of the programme opens Monday 25 May. People can find out more on the Growth Ladder webpage. There are also a host of free business growth workshops which people can sign up to now.
- 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 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.
- **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.

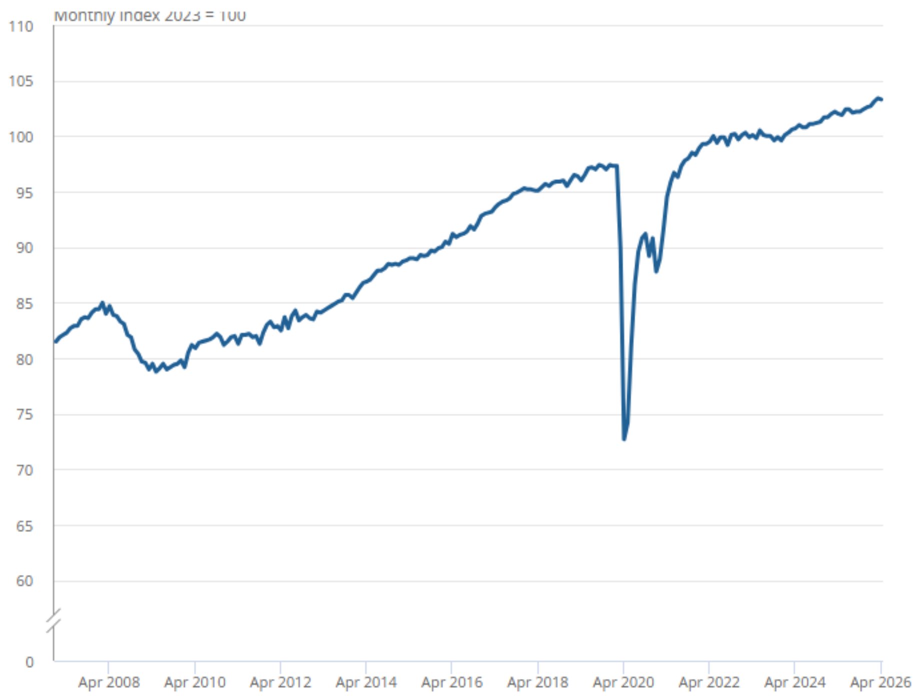
National Context

- This month **Sir Keir Starmer announced his resignation as Labour Party leader**, paving the way for a contest to decide a new Prime Minister.
- We have also **seen temperatures rise across the country**, the Met Office issues rare red weather warnings with a red heat health alert issued in England indicating "a risk to life for even the healthy population." **Extreme heat can also impact economic growth** by reducing labour productivity, stunting crop yields, and disrupting critical infrastructure like transportation and energy grids.

Economy

- The **UK economy contracted by 0.1% in April 2026**, following growths of 0.3% in March 2026 and 0.4% in February 2026. This fall was driven by a 0.2% fall in services, which was partially offset by a 0.1% rise in construction; production showed no growth.

GDP Monthly index, January 2007 to April 2026, UK



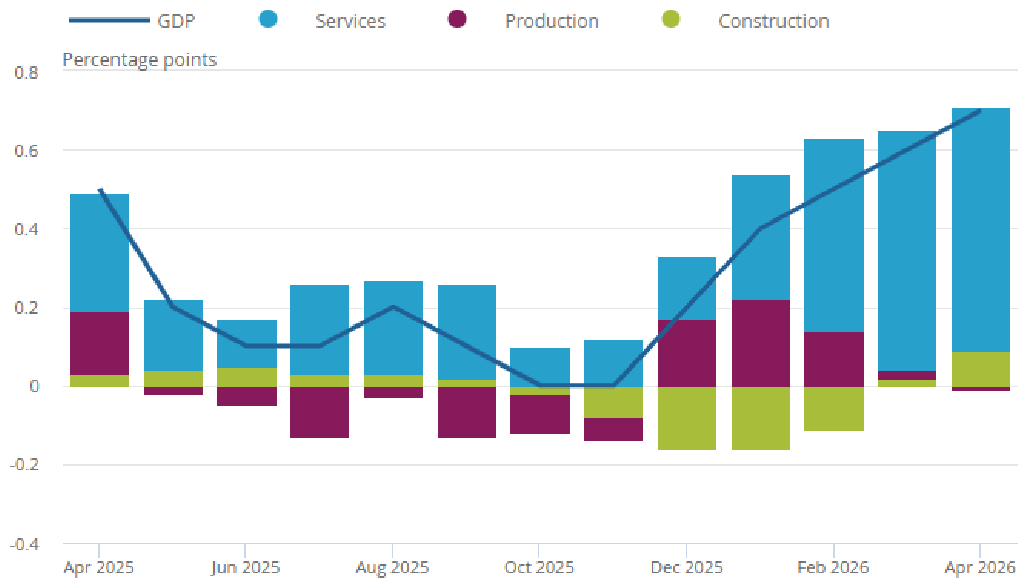
Source: Gross domestic product (GDP) monthly estimate from the Office for National Statistics

- **In the three months to April 2026, compared with the three months to January 2026 real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 0.7%**, following a growth of 0.6% in the three months to March 2026 and a growth of 0.5% in the three months to February 2026.
- **Services output grew by 0.8%**, after also growing by 0.8% in the three months to March 2026.
- **Production output contracted by 0.1%**; this follows a growth of 0.2% in the three months

to March 2026.

- **Construction output grew by 1.6%**, following a 0.4% growth in the three months to March 2026; this continues a partial recovery following five consecutive three-monthly falls from October 2025 to February 2026.

Contributions to three-month GDP growth, UK, April 2025 to April 2026

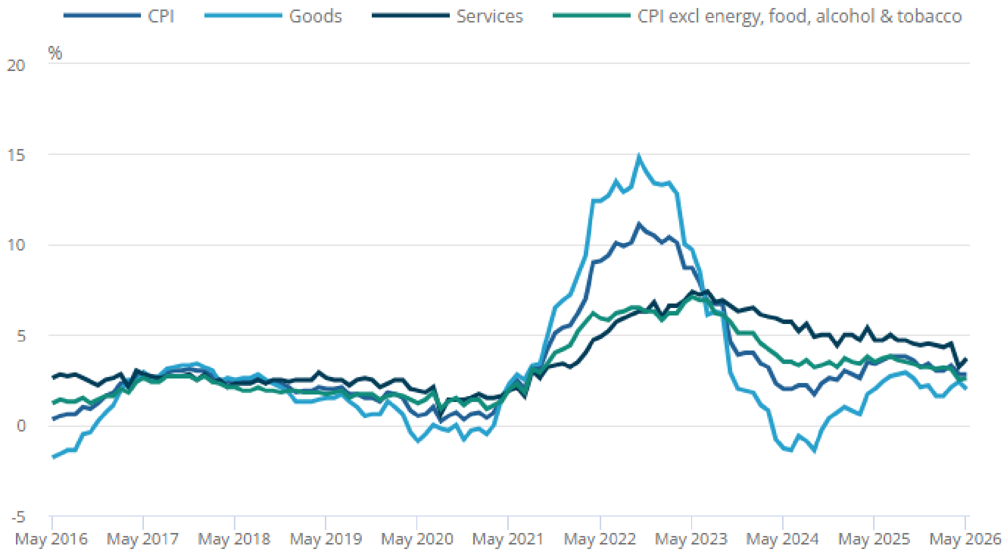


Source: Gross domestic product (GDP) monthly estimate from the Office for National Statistics

Cost of Living

- **Inflation remained at 2.8 per cent in May**, transport made the largest upward contribution to the monthly change in inflation; food and non-alcoholic beverages made the largest, partially offsetting, downward contribution.
- **Inflation remains above the 2 per cent target set by the Bank of England**. Over the coming months it is expected that higher energy prices will feed through into higher inflation via food, core goods, and services, with the impact felt more by households than businesses. Although large firms show greater exposure to energy price risk.

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



Source: Consumer price inflation from the Office for National Statistics

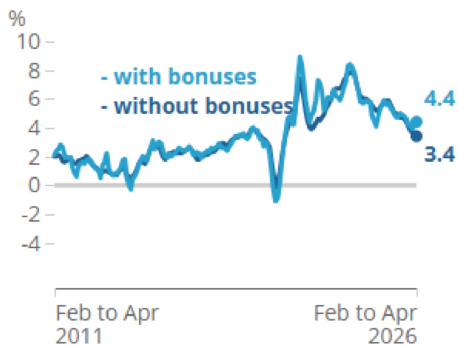
- **Annual growth in employees' average earnings in Great Britain was 3.4% for regular earnings (excluding bonuses), and 4.4% for total earnings (including bonuses) in February to April 2026.** Annual average regular earnings growth was 5.1% for the public sector and 2.9% for the private sector. Public sector pay growth is once again affected by the timing of pay awards varying this year.
- **Annual growth in real terms, adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH), was 0.1% for regular pay and 1.2% for total pay in February to April 2026.**
- **Annual growth in real terms, adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Prices Index excluding owner occupiers' housing costs (CPI), was 0.3% for regular pay and 1.3% for total pay in February to April 2026.**

Nominal Earnings

Average Weekly Earnings annual growth rates – nominal pay

Nominal regular earnings continue the reduction seen in annual growth rates over the past year.

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

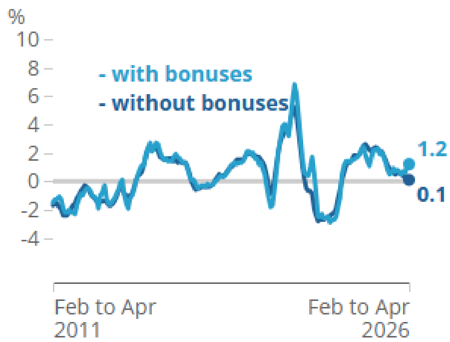


Real Earnings CPIH

Average Weekly Earnings annual growth rates – real pay using CPIH

Real earnings (adjusted by CPIH) growth rate remains positive in the latest period

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

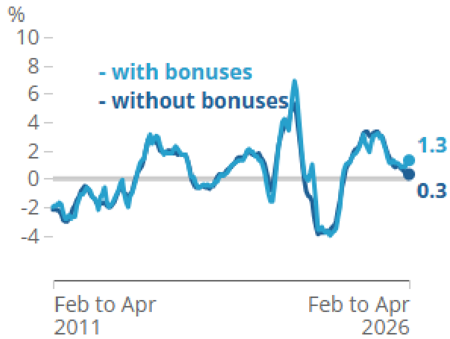


Real Earnings CPI

Average Weekly Earnings annual growth rates – real pay using CPI

Real earnings (adjusted by CPI) growth rate remains positive in the latest period

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



- There were an estimated 120,000 working days lost because of labour disputes across the UK in April 2026, with the majority of working days lost in the health and social work sector because of the doctors' strikes in England.

Business Conditions

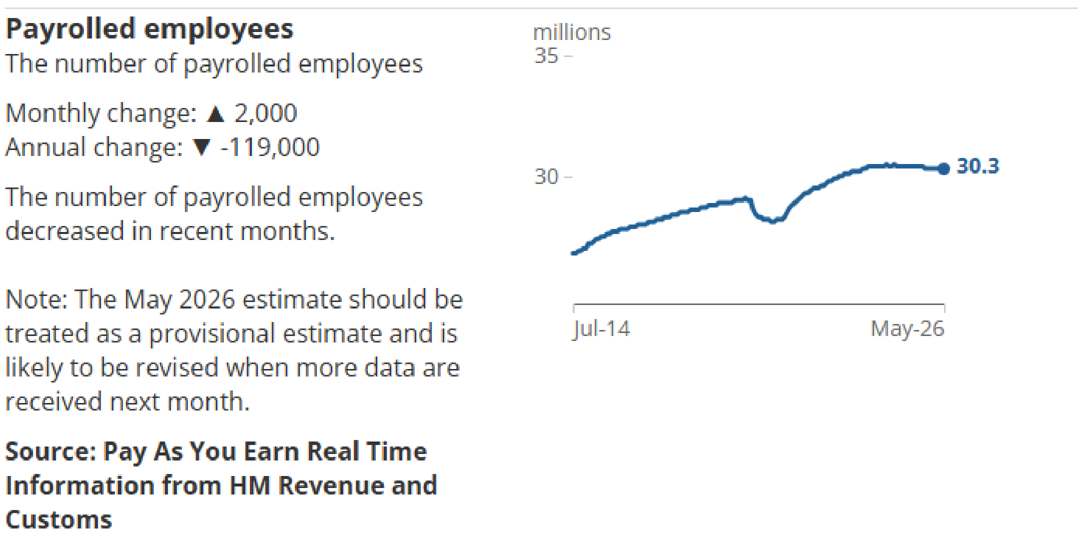
- The latest results from Wave 158 of the **Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS)**, which was live from 1 to 14 June 2026, suggest that **business conditions remain challenging due to several factors including the ongoing conflict in the Middle East**.
- **A quarter (25%) of trading businesses reported that their turnover had decreased** in May 2026 when compared with the previous month, this is 2 percentage points down from April 2026; **21% of businesses with 10 or more employees reported that their turnover had increased**, broadly stable with April, but down 4 percentage points (25%) from a year ago in May 2025.
- **Economic uncertainty (33%) remained the most reported challenge affecting turnover** for trading businesses in June, broadly stable with early May; **for businesses with 10 or more employees, cost of labour (38%) was the most reported challenge**, also broadly stable with May.
- **37% of trading businesses reported an increase in prices of goods and services bought** in May, down 4 percentage points from April (40%), but 7 percentage points up from February (29%); **13% reported an increase in the prices of goods or services sold**, down 3 percentage points from April but broadly stable with February.
- **Almost one in five (19%) trading businesses expect the prices of goods and services that they sell to increase** in July 2026, this is broadly stable with expectations for June

2026; **27% of businesses reported they were considering raising their prices because of energy prices**, an increase of 11 percentage points compared with July 2025.

- **Almost two-thirds (63%) of businesses expressed some degree of concern regarding energy prices** in early June, broadly stable with late May; **65% of businesses reported some degree of concern about fuel prices** in early June, down 3 percentage points from late May (68%).
- **5% of trading businesses reported that they experienced global supply chain disruption** in May, broadly stable with April but down 4 percentage points from the recent peak in March (9%); of these businesses, **50% cited the conflict in the Middle East as a reason for the disruption**.
- The latest business insolvencies data shows that **in May 2026 there were a total of 1,804 company insolvencies in England and Wales, 19% lower than the number registered in the previous year (2,228 in May 2025), and 29% lower than the number registered three years previously (2,550 in May 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:



Employment rate

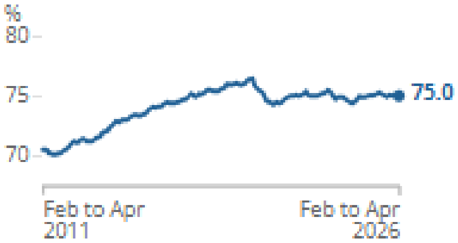
Employment rate (all aged 16 to 64 years)

Quarterly change: ◀▶ 0.0pps
Annual change: ◀▶ 0.0pps

The employment rate is largely unchanged on both the year and the quarter.

Note: Caution should be taken when drawing conclusions from short-term changes, given volatility of Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates, and we advise users to focus on long-term movements in the data.

Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics



Unemployment rate

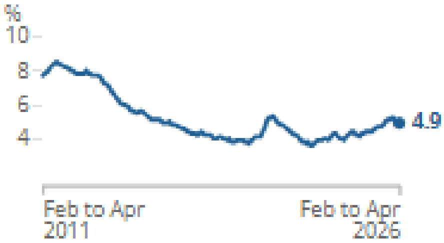
Unemployment rate (all aged 16 years and over)

Quarterly change: ▼-0.3pps
Annual change: ▲ 0.3pps

The unemployment rate is up on the year but down on the quarter.

Note: Caution should be taken when drawing conclusions from short-term changes, given volatility of Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates, and we advise users to focus on long-term movements in the data.

Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics



Inactivity rate

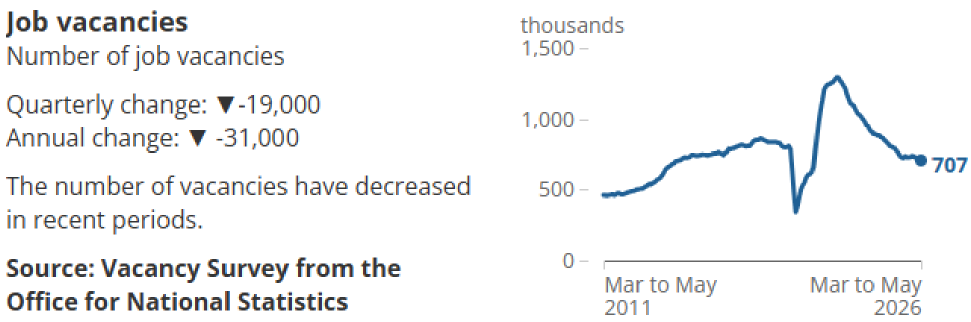
Economic inactivity rate (all aged 16 to 64 years)

Quarterly change: ▲0.3pps
Annual change: ▼ -0.3pps

The economic inactivity rate is down on the year but up on the quarter.

Note: Caution should be taken when drawing conclusions from short-term changes, given volatility of Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates, and we advise users to focus on long-term movements in the data.

Source: Labour Force Survey from the Office for National Statistics



- **Estimates for payrolled employees in the UK fell by 138,000 (0.5%) between April 2025 and April 2026 and decreased by 53,000 (0.2%) between March and April 2026**. This is based on administrative data from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC).
- When looking at February to April 2026, the period comparable with our Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates, the number of payrolled employees fell by 103,000 (0.3%) over the year and by 31,000 (0.1%) over the quarter.
- **The early estimate of payrolled employees for May 2026 decreased by 119,000 (0.4%) on the year, but was largely unchanged on the month, increasing by just 2,000 (0.0%) to 30.3 million**. Figures for May should be treated as provisional estimates and are likely to be revised when more data are received next month. Early months in the tax year typically carry a greater degree of uncertainty in their initial estimates; such estimates in recent years have received larger than average upward revisions.
- Estimates from January to March 2025 include the full effect of the improvements in Labour Force Survey (LFS) data collection and sampling methods introduced from January 2024 onwards. However, some volatility remains, particularly for estimates for mid-2023 and throughout 2024, and for granular breakdowns, where sample sizes are smaller. Caution should be taken when drawing conclusions from short-term changes, and ONS advise users to focus on long term movements in the data.
- ONS recommend using 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 February to April 2026. This is largely unchanged on both the year and the latest quarter.
- The **UK unemployment rate** for people aged 16 years and over was estimated at **4.9%** in February to April 2026. This is up 0.3 percentage points on the year but down 0.3 percentage points on the latest quarter.
- The **UK economic inactivity rate** for people aged 16 to 64 years was estimated at **21.0%** in February to April 2026. This is down 0.3 percentage points on the year but up 0.3

percentage points on the latest quarter.

- **The UK Claimant Count for May 2026 increased on both the month and the year to an estimated 1.712 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.
- The estimated number of **vacancies in the UK decreased in the latest quarter**. Early estimates for March to May 2026 suggest a **decrease of 19,000 (2.6%) to 707,000**, compared with December 2025 to February 2026. This is the **lowest level of vacancies since February to April 2021**.
- The **estimated number of workforce jobs in the UK was 36.8 million in March 2026**. This is an increase of 256,000 (0.7%) from December 2025, with an increase of 177,000 (4.4%) in the self-employment jobs component and an increase of 81,000 (0.3%) in the employee jobs component. Over the year, the estimated number of workforce jobs was down by 98,000 (0.3%), with a decrease of 127,000 (2.9%) in the self-employment jobs component but an increase of 30,000 (0.1%) in the employee jobs component.

Conclusion

- We now know that **we will have yet another new Prime Minister**, leading to further political uncertainty and concerns regarding **potential new Government policy directions**. This comes at a time when the **country has been experiencing extremely hot temperatures** with impacts on the economy and society.
- The **UK economy contracted slightly in April**, following a period of growth, driven by a **fall in services with some of this attributed to effects from the conflict in the Middle East**, with the cancellation of multiple sporting events in the Middle East affecting the output of UK-based businesses. While **construction continued to see a partial recovery following a long period of decline**.
- **Inflation remained unchanged above the Bank of England's target of 2 per cent**, meaning that households and businesses will still be feeling the pain of higher prices. It is expected that **the conflict in the middle east will likely lead to inflation increasing and rising interest rates** to keep it in check, **further adding to the pressures that households and businesses are already experiencing**.
- Alongside **rising global uncertainty and the introduction of new business-related UK taxes**, many businesses are seeing their turnover impacted by **longer-term issues including high interest rates and energy prices, increased commodity costs, wage pressures, supply-chain disruption, lower consumer confidence,** and **some labour market challenges**.
- The **labour market continues to loosen, with wage growth having slowed and payrolled employees seeing a decline**, it is also a concern that **economic inactivity has seen a recent rise**. **This comes at a time when job vacancies have seen a long-term**

decline to their lowest level in five years, 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**.

- During these challenging times 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 **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 May 2026, which shows the number of new companies and individuals who are unable to pay debts and enter a formal insolvency procedure.

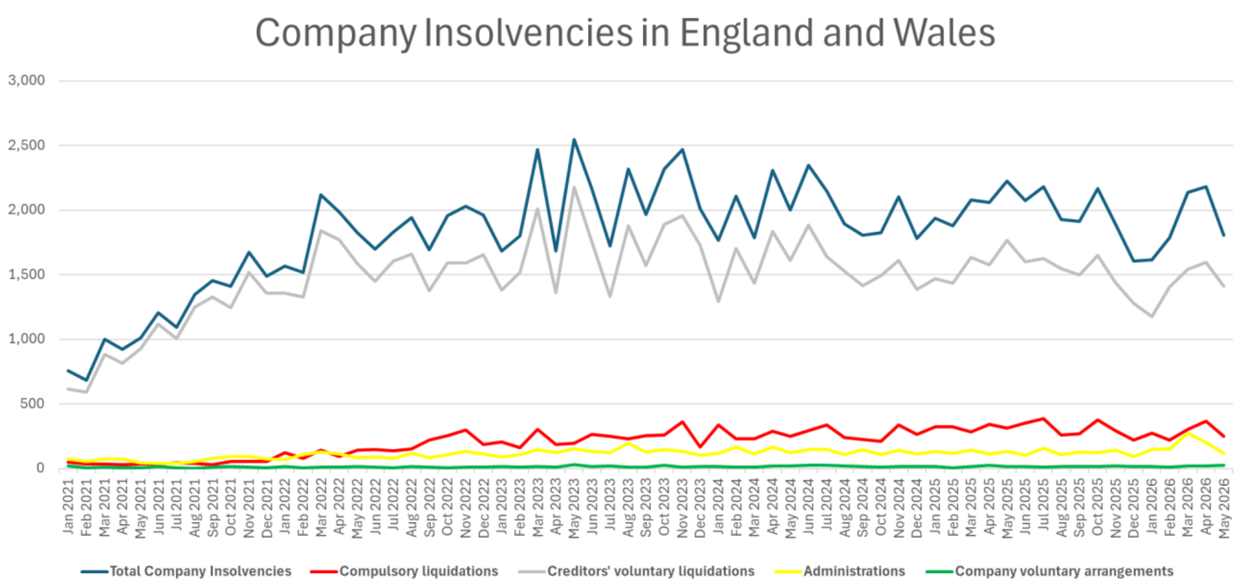
Company Insolvencies

In May 2026 there were a total of 1,804 company insolvencies in England and Wales. The overall number of **company insolvencies are 19% lower than the number registered in the previous year (2,228 in May 2025), and 29% lower than the number registered three years previously (2,550 in May 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 249 compulsory liquidations in May 2026, 21% lower than the number in May 2025, but 28% higher than in May 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 May 2026 there were 1,412 Creditors' Voluntary Liquidations (CVLs), 20% lower than May 2025, and 35% lower than May 2023. Numbers of administrations are 22% lower than three years previously in May 2023, Company Voluntary Arrangements (CVAs) are 17% lower than three years previously in May 2023, and numbers are low.

Company insolvencies between June 2025 and May 2026 are 3% lower compared to a year earlier, representing 807 fewer businesses



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

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[1]*Source: The Insolvency Service* – [Company insolvencies, May 2026 - GOV.UK]()

The sectors to have seen the largest number of company insolvencies between May 2025 and April 2026 continue to be the Construction sector (3,907), Wholesale & Retail sector (3,628), and Accommodation & Food Service sector (3,318). Levels are below those seen for the same period the previous year for the Construction sector -3% lower, but stable for the Wholesale & Retail sector +0%, and lower for the Accommodation & Food sector -2% lower than levels a year earlier. Overall, for this period company insolvencies by industry are -1% lower.

Individual Insolvencies

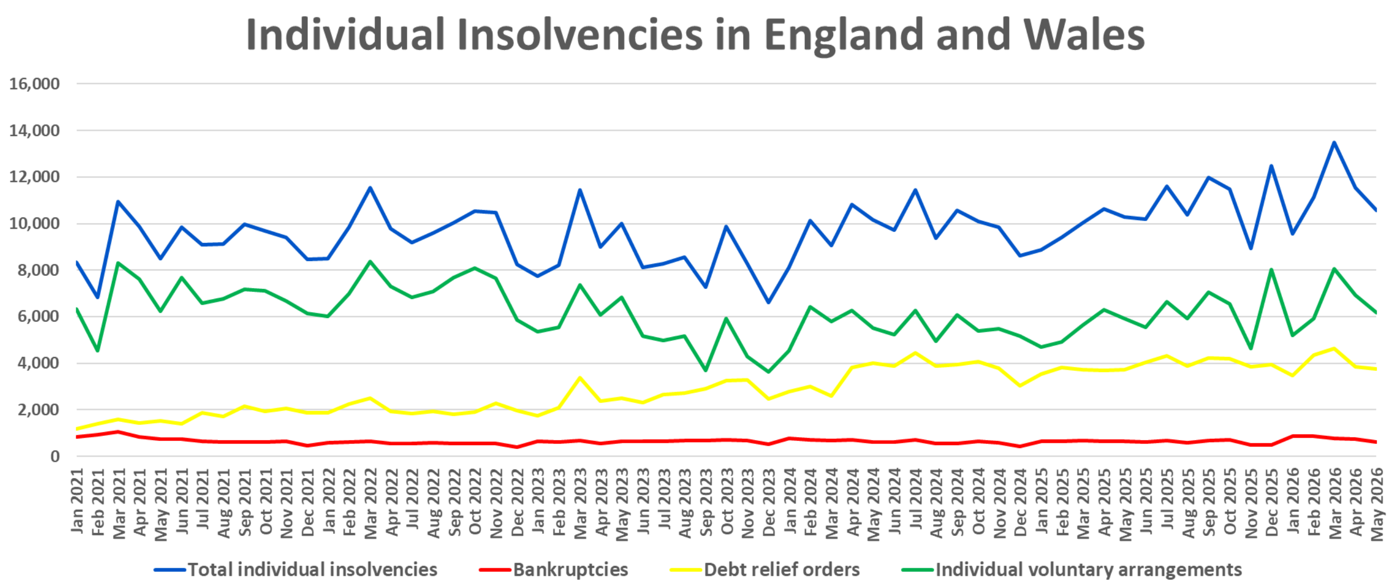
There were **10,560 total individual insolvencies in May 2026**, which was 3% lower than in May 2025, and 6% lower than in May 2023.

For individuals, **604 bankruptcies were registered in May 2026**, 5% lower than in May 2025, and 8% lower than in May 2023. (Please note the Insolvency Service moved to a new case management system on 1 November 2025, which resulted in delays to recording data).

There were **3,769 Debt Relief Orders (DROs) in May 2026**, 1% higher than in May 2025, and 50% higher than in May 2023.

There were **6,187 Individual Voluntary Arrangements (IVAs) registered in May 2026**, which was 4% higher than in May 2025, and 9% lower than in May 2023.

Total Individual Insolvencies between June 2025 and May 2026 are 12% higher than the same period a year earlier, representing an increase of 14,451.



Source: Insolvency Service

There were **4,817 Breathing Space registrations in May 2026, which is 38% lower than the number registered in May 2025**. 4,693 were Standard Breathing Space registrations, which is 39% lower and 124 were Mental Health Breathing Space registrations, which is 2% higher than May 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 and have increased every year since 2021.**

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: May 2026

Area	Claimant Count Rate (May 2025)	Claimant Count Rate (April 2026)	Claimant Count Rate[1] (May 2026)	Number of Claimants (May 2026)	Annual Change in Claimants (Numbers)	Annual Change in Claimants (%)
England	4.0	4.0	4.1	1,499,950	12,630	0.8%
West Midlands	5.3	5.2	5.3	202,625	-400	-0.2%
Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent	3.5	3.4	3.4	24,370	-520	-2.1%
Birmingham	10.2	9.9	10.1	77,925	-590	-0.8%
Wolverhampton	6.9	6.6	6.8	11,975	-210	-1.7%
Sandwell	6.9	6.6	6.7	14,970	-575	-3.7%
Walsall	5.9	5.8	5.9	10,675	5	0.0%
Coventry	5.6	5.7	5.8	14,005	450	3.3%
Stoke-on-Trent	**5.7**	**5.4**	**5.4**	**9,100**	**-525**	**-5.5%**
Dudley	4.7	4.6	4.6	9,340	-225	-2.4%
Telford and Wrekin	3.6	3.8	3.9	4,745	330	7.5%
Solihull	3.6	3.6	3.6	4,705	-15	-0.3%
Worcestershire	3.0	3.0	3.0	11,160	150	1.4%
Warwickshire	2.7	2.8	2.9	11,270	750	7.1%
Staffordshire	**2.8**	**2.7**	**2.8**	**15,270**	**5**	**0.0%**
Herefordshire, County of	2.6	2.6	2.6	2,865	-20	-0.7%
Shropshire	2.4	2.4	2.4	4,620	65	1.4%
East Staffordshire	3.6	3.3	3.3	2,655	-205	-7.2%
Tamworth	3.2	3.2	3.3	1,665	65	4.1%
Cannock Chase	3.1	3.1	3.1	2,010	20	1.0%
Newcastle-under-Lyme	3.0	2.8	3.0	2,345	-70	-2.9%
South Staffordshire	2.5	2.5	2.6	1,750	60	3.6%
Stafford	2.3	2.5	2.6	2,160	225	11.6%
Lichfield	2.3	2.2	2.3	1,495	0	0.0%
Staffordshire Moorlands	2.3	2.1	2.1	1,190	-85	-6.7%

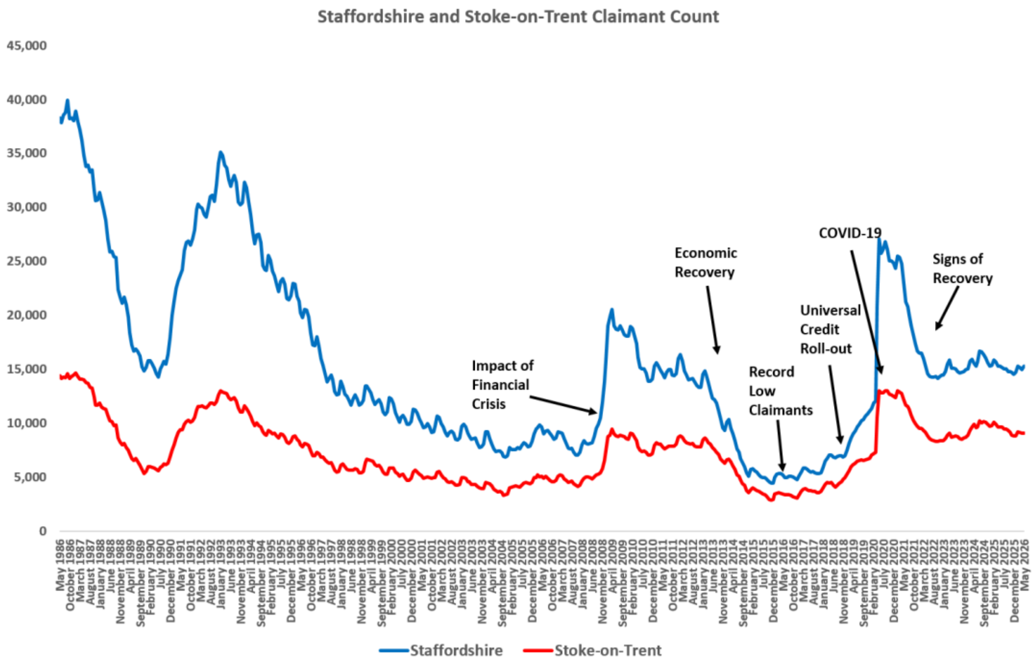
[1] The claimant rate is the proportion of the working age population claiming Universal Credit

- The **claimant count in Staffordshire currently stands at 15,270 this is 5 more claimants than at the same time last year.** Staffordshire has seen no change proportionately since last year, which is slightly higher than the reduction seen regionally (-0.2%) but lower than the national level (+0.8%).

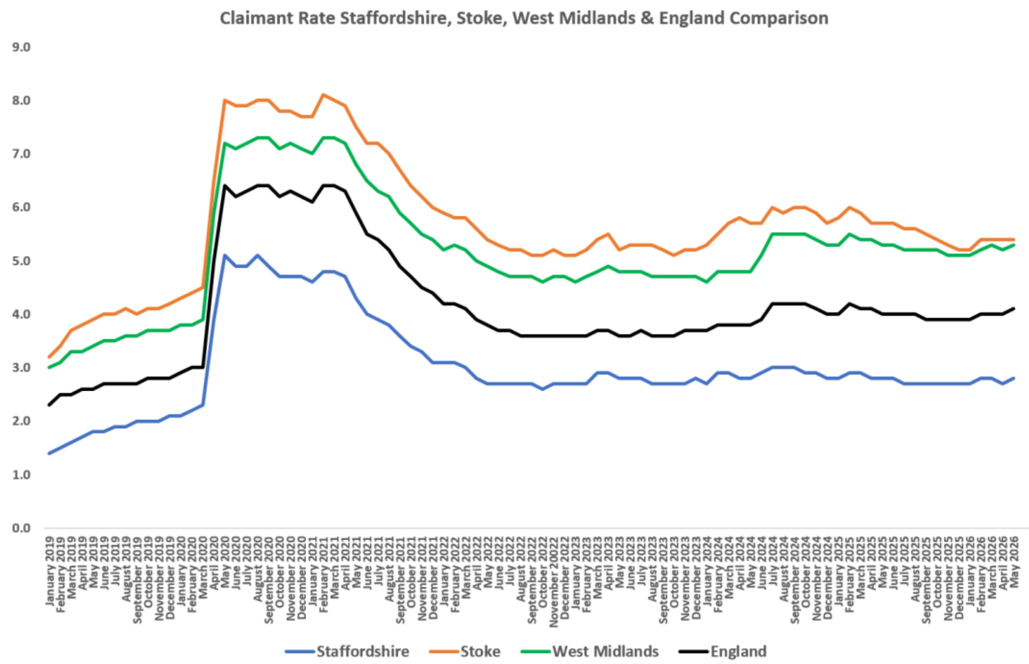
- The **claimant rate in Staffordshire is currently 2.8%** of the working age population, which has **remained unchanged since a year earlier.**

- The number of **claimants in Stoke-on-Trent stands at 9,100**, which is 525 lower than a year earlier, and the **claimant rate has decreased from 5.7% the previous year to 5.4%.**

[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 5.3% which has remained unchanged since the previous year, and lower than the average for England of 4.1% which has increased from 4.0% since 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.

- **Claimant numbers have increased across around half of Staffordshire's districts over the last year, including Cannock Chase, Stafford, South Staffordshire, and Tamworth.**
- **All districts have a lower claimant rate than both the regional and national rates**. The highest claimant rate at 3.3% 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

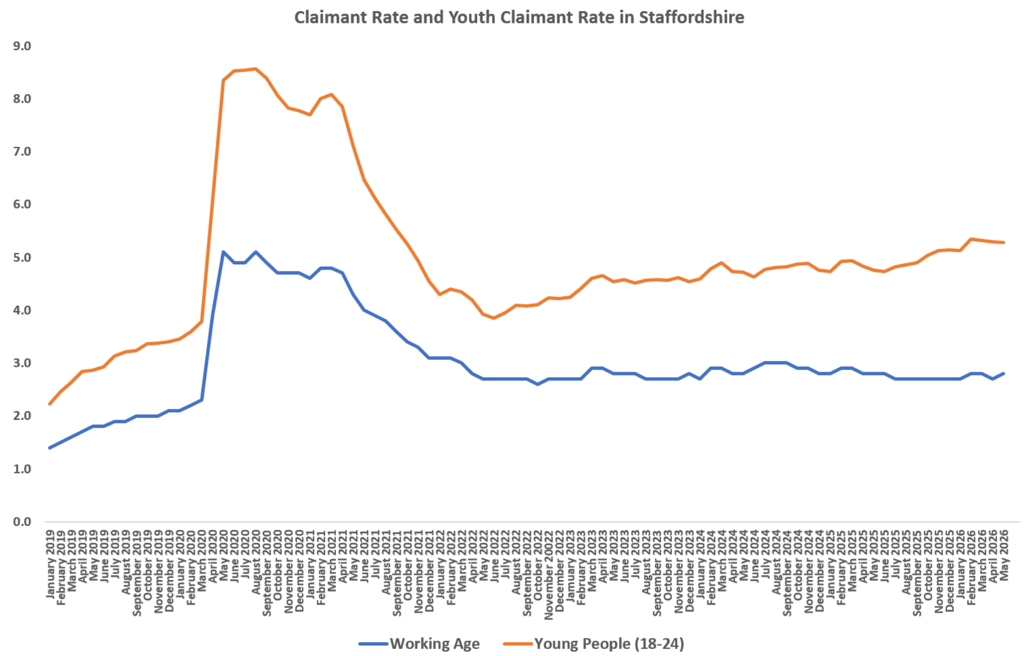
Youth Claimant Count (Universal Credit) Statistics: May 2026

Area	Youth Claimant Count Rate (May 2025)	Youth Claimant Count Rate (April 2026)	Youth Claimant Count Rate[1] (May 2026)	Number of Youth Claimants (May 2026)	Annual Change in Youth Claimants (Numbers)	Annual Change in Youth Claimants (%)
England	5.3	5.8	5.8	286,500	25,360	9.7%
West Midlands	7.3	7.9	8.0	42,170	3,935	10.3%
Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent	5.7	6.1	6.0	5,220	310	6.3%
Birmingham	9.9	10.8	11.0	15,860	1,485	10.3%
Wolverhampton	10.0	10.4	10.7	2,455	175	7.7%
Wallsall	9.3	10.0	10.1	2,390	190	8.6%
Sandwell	9.6	9.7	9.8	3,010	65	2.2%
Dudley	7.6	8.5	8.5	2,045	210	11.4%
Stoke-on-Trent	**8.1**	**8.1**	**8.1**	**1,910**	**-15**	**-0.8%**
Solihull	6.3	7.7	7.6	1,120	190	20.4%
Telford and Wrekin	6.3	7.3	7.5	1,145	190	19.9%
Coventry	5.3	6.0	6.0	2,810	325	13.1%
Worcestershire	4.9	5.6	5.5	2,280	235	11.5%
Staffordshire	**4.8**	**5.3**	**5.3**	**3,310**	**325**	**10.9%**
Warwickshire	4.3	5.1	5.2	2,355	420	21.7%
Herefordshire, County of	4.5	5.0	5.0	555	60	12.1%
Shropshire	4.2	4.6	4.5	920	70	8.2%
Tamworth	6.4	7.2	7.4	400	50	14.3%
Cannock Chase	5.9	6.5	6.4	440	30	7.3%
South Staffordshire	5.2	5.9	5.8	395	40	11.3%
Stafford	4.4	5.5	5.5	450	90	25.0%
East Staffordshire	5.2	5.3	5.2	455	-5	-1.1%
Lichfield	4.1	4.5	4.7	335	45	15.5%
Newcastle-under-Lyme	4.0	4.2	4.4	595	50	9.2%
Staffordshire Moorlands	3.8	4.5	4.2	240	25	11.6%

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

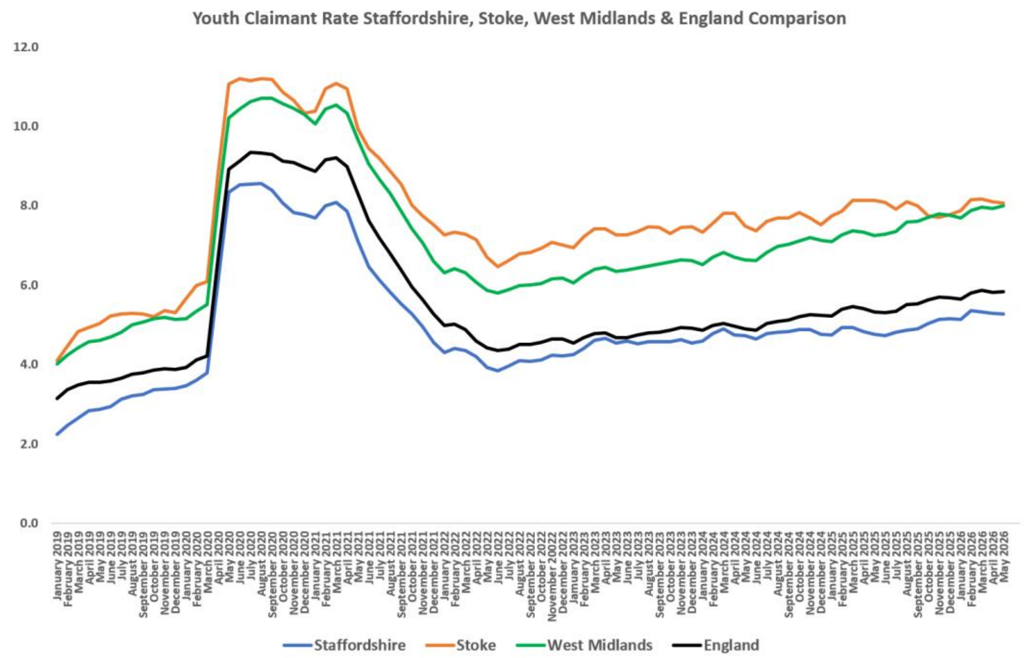
- The **youth claimant count in Staffordshire currently stands at 3,310, which is 325 more youth claimants than at the same time last year.** This is equivalent to a 10.9% annual increase, higher than the increases seen regionally (9.7%) and nationally (10.3%).

- The **youth claimant rate in Staffordshire is currently 5.3% of the 18-24 population, an increase from 4.8% a year earlier.** It is a concerning trend seen regionally and nationally.



- The number of **youth claimants in Stoke-on-Trent stands at 1,910**, which is 15 lower than a year earlier, with **the rate at 8.1%, and remains unchanged since a year earlier.**

- It is important to note that **Staffordshire continues to be lower than the national rate of 5.8%, which increased from 5.3% and far lower than the regional rate of 8.0% which increased from 7.3% over the past year**.



- **The majority of districts in Staffordshire have seen increases in the number of youth claimants over the last year, except for East Staffordshire which saw a decrease of 5 claimants**.

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

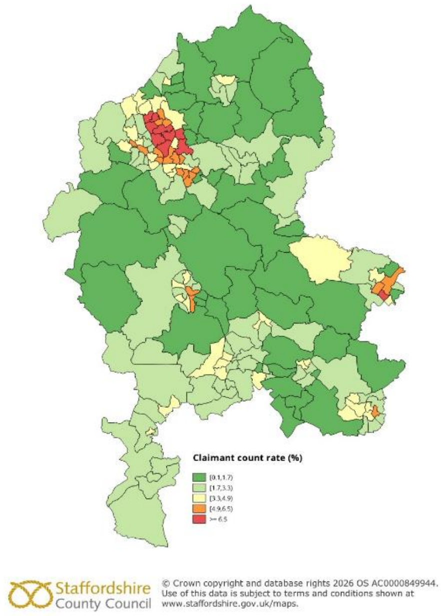
The following summaries and maps provide the latest breakdown of the claimant count by wards in Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent. Please note that due to geographical changes in ward data from Nomis/ONS (17 Feb 2026), comparative data is based on January 2026.

Claimant Count Rate May 2026

Of the 185 wards in Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent, 42 were above the England average of 4.1% for the number of claimants as a proportion of the working age population.

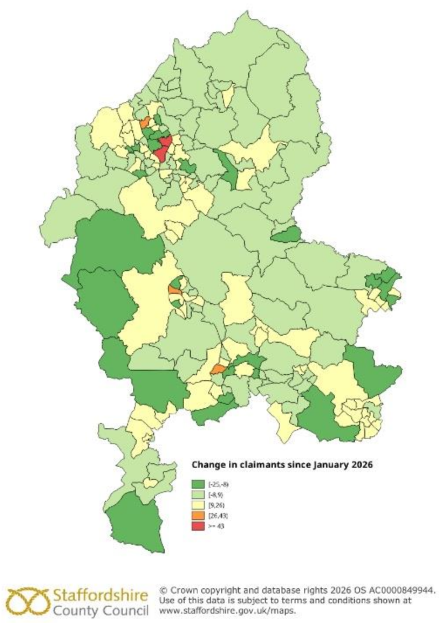
Within the twenty highest claimant rate wards, seventeen were in Stoke-on-Trent with the highest rates in Tunstall: 8.2%/390; Burslem: 7.6%/390; Hanley Park, Joiner's Square & Shelton: 7.6%/940; Etruria & Hanley: 7.3%/380; Bentilee, Ubberley & Townsend: 6.7%/550 claimants.

In Staffordshire, three wards in East Staffordshire had the highest claimant rates - Anglesey: 7.2%/420; Shobnall: 6.2%/360; Burton & Eton: 6.0%/450.



Change in Claimant Count since Jan 2026

The ten wards in Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent with the highest change in the number of claimants include five wards in Stoke-on-Trent (Birches Head & Northwood): 60 increase to 475; (Hanley Park, Joiner's Square & Shelton): 45 increase to 940; (Tunstall): 35 increase to 390; (Sandford Hill): 25 increase to 230; (Basford & Hartshill): 25 increase to 135; Doxey & Castletown (Stafford) : 30 increase to 145; two wards in Cannock Chase (Cannock Park & Old Fallow): 30 increase to 205, (Western Springs): 25 increase to 180; Curborough (Lichfield): 25 increase to 115; Bradwell(Newcastle-under-Lyme): 25 increase to 160.

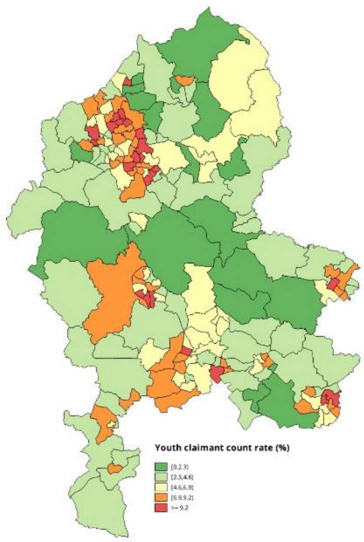


Youth Claimant Count Rate May 2026

Of the 185 wards in Staffordshire & Stoke-Trent, 88 were above the England average 5.8% for the number of claimants aged 18-24 a proportion of the 18-24 population.

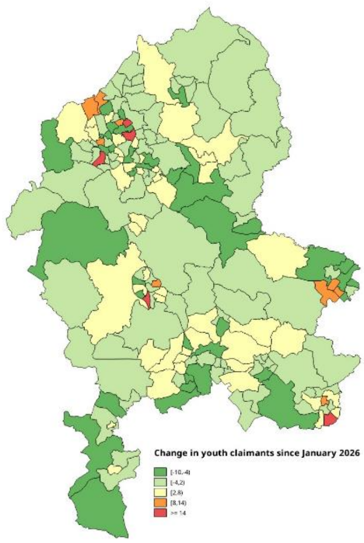
Of the ten wards with the highest youth claimant count rate, six were in Stoke-on-Trent including Meir South: 11.6%/60; Sandford Hill: 11.6%/50; Fenton East: 11.3%/55; Meir North: 11.1%/65; Little Chell & Stanfield: 10.9%/60; Hollybush: 10.8%/45.

Staffordshire wards with the highest claimant rate include two wards in Stafford (Penkside): 11.3%/25 & (Manor): 10.7%/45; Chadsmoor (Cannock Chase): 11.1%/80; Bolehall (Tamworth): 10.9%/50.



Change in Youth Claimant Count since Jan 2026

The ten wards in Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent with the highest change in the number of youth claimants include three wards in Stoke-on Trent (Birches Head & Northwood): 20 increase to 70; (Ford Green & Smallthorne): 15 increase to 45; (Burslem Park): 10 increase to 40; and seven wards in Staffordshire including Manor (Stafford): 15 increase to 45; two wards in Tamworth (Winecote): 15 increase to 40 and Bolehall: 10 increase to 50; three wards in Newcastle-under-Lyme (Westlands): 15 increase to 35, (Cross Heath): 10 increase to 50 and (Kidsgrove & Ravenscliffe): 10 increase to 50; Shobnall (East Staffordshire): 10 increase to 75.

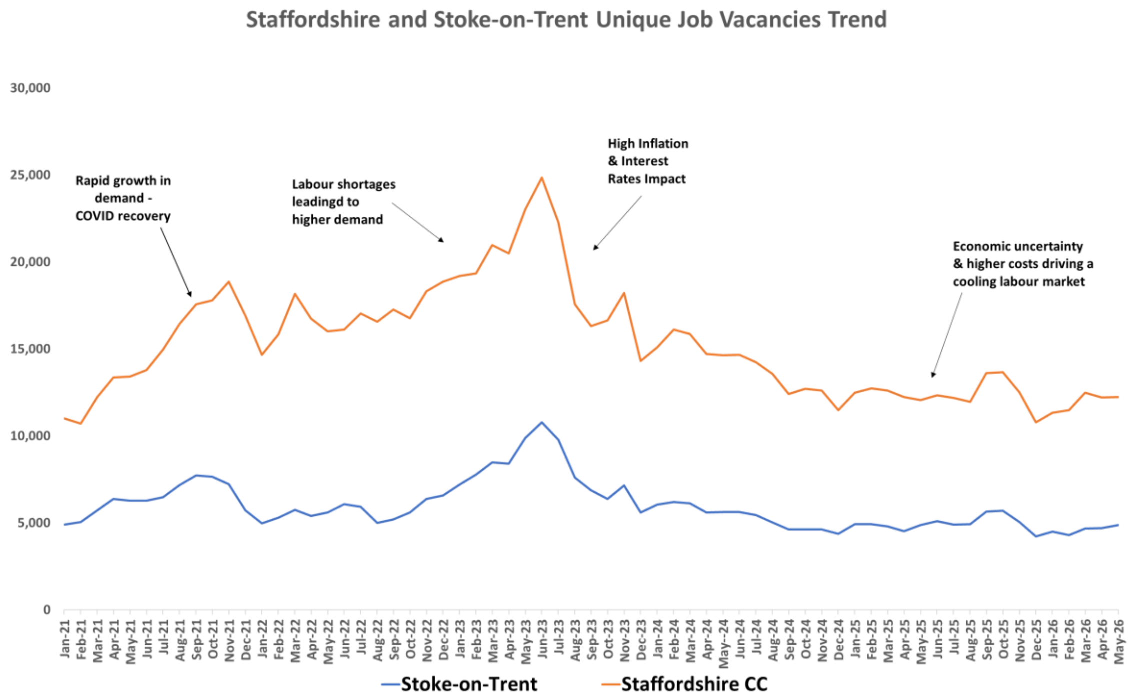


Job Vacancies[3]

- **Staffordshire saw a 1% increase in the number of available job vacancies between May 2025 and May 2026 to a total of 12,200[4]. This was the same as the increase seen regionally, but lower than the national increase. Stoke-on-Trent saw negligible change in job vacancies over the past year to a total of 4,900 which is significantly lower than the number of claimants.**

- **Across the region over the past year there was a 1% increase, and nationally there was a 4% increase 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 an increase in vacancies over the past year. Whilst 'Managers, Directors & Senior Officials' occupations increased +19%, 'Sales & Customer Service' occupations saw a decrease of -9%.

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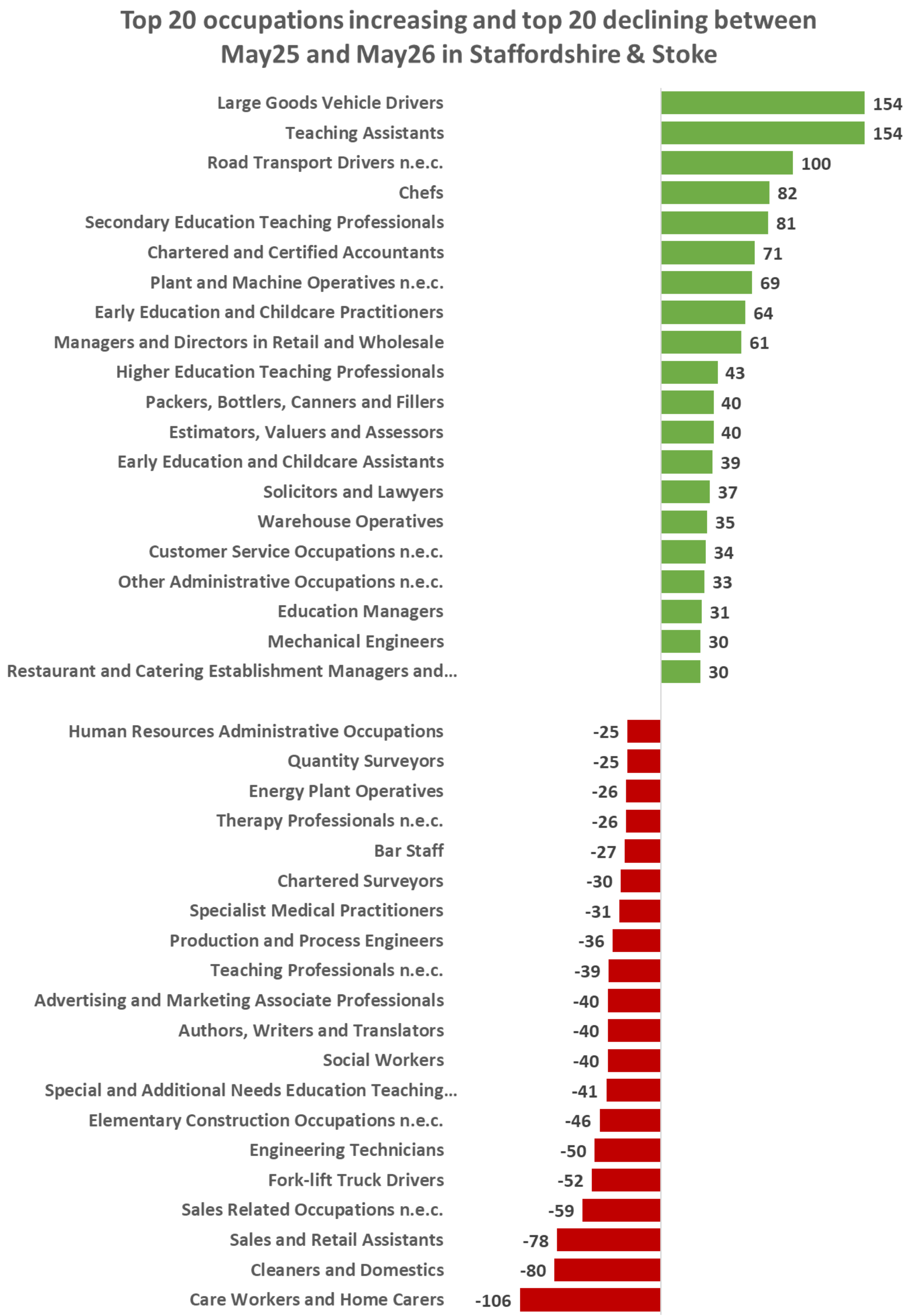
[3] *Source: Lightcast*
[4] *Lightcast upgraded its location coding process for UK job postings on 19 February 2024. As a result of this change, historic posting counts are estimated to have annual changes of -0.5 to -1% in 2018-19 & 2021; +1%-2% 2020 & 2022-2024.*

- The occupations to see the largest year-on-year increases include Large Goods Vehicle Drivers; Teaching Assistants; Road Transport Drivers; Chefs; Secondary Education Teaching Professionals; Chartered & Certified Accountants; Plant & Machine Operatives; Early Education & Childcare Practitioners; Managers & Directors in Retail & Wholesale; Higher Education Teaching Professionals; Packers, Bottlers, Canners & Fillers; Estimators, Valuers & Assessors; Early Education & Childcare Assistants; Solicitors & Lawyers; Warehouse Operatives; Customer Service; Other Administrative; Education Managers; Mechanical Engineers; Restaurant & Catering Establishment Managers & Proprietors.



- The occupations to see the largest year-on-year decrease include Care Workers & Home Carers; Cleaners & Domestics; Sales & Retail Assistants; Sales Related; Fork-lift Truck Drivers; Engineering Technicians; Elementary Construction; SEND Teaching Professionals; Social Workers; Authors, Writers & Translators; Advertising & Marketing Associate Professionals; Teaching Professionals; Production & Process Engineers; Specialist Medical Practitioners; Chartered Surveyors; Bar Staff; Therapy Professionals; Energy Plant Operatives; Quantity Surveyors; HR Administrative.

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 **'Sales Related' 'Large Goods Vehicle Drivers'** and **'Teaching Assistants'** show continued recruitment demand.

- Within the Education sector, vacancy levels remain elevated for **'Secondary Education Teaching Professionals,' 'SEND Teaching Professionals,' 'Teaching Professionals,'** and **'Primary Teaching Professionals.'**

- Vacancy demand also remains strong for **'Cleaners & Domestics.'**

- In the Hospitality sector **'Kitchen & Catering Assistants'** and **'Chefs'** remain key occupations for recruitment.

- In the Retail and Wholesale sector, **'Managers & Directors'** and **'Sales & Retail Assistants'** continue to attract strong employer demand.

- The Logistics sector continues to have strong demand for **'Warehouse Operatives.'**

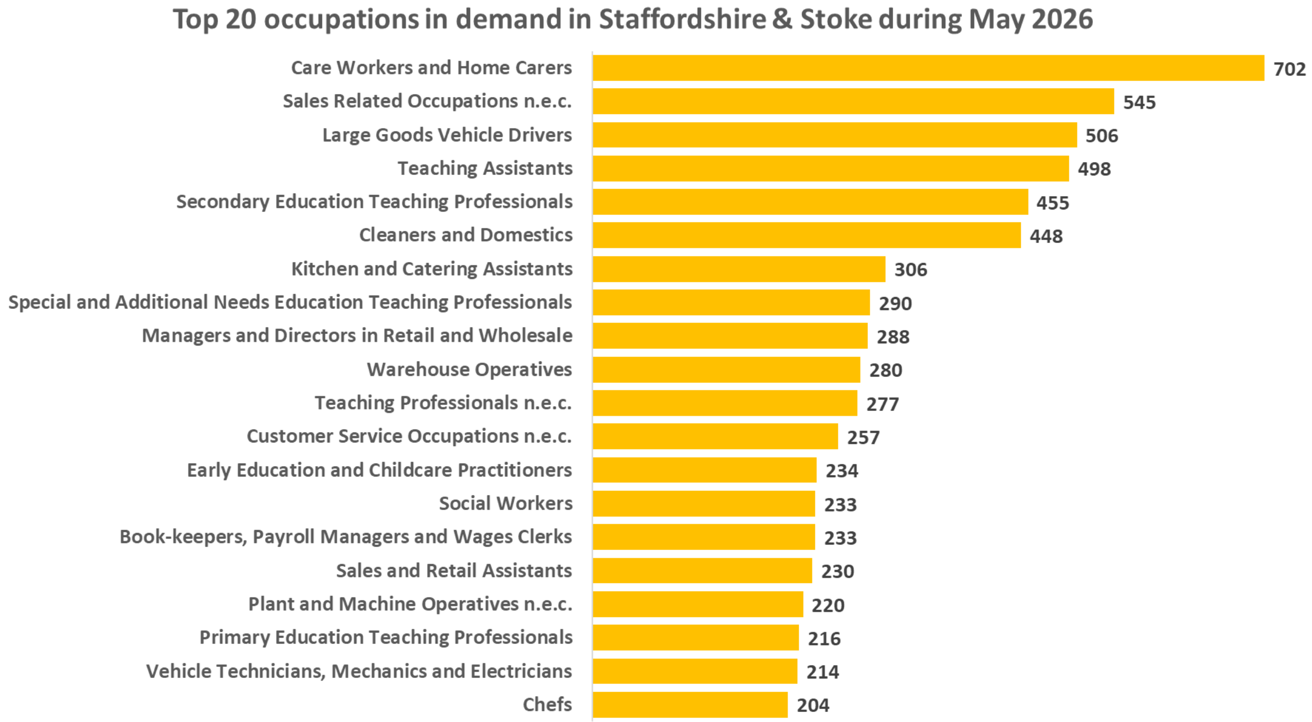
- Across business sectors **'Customer Service'** and **'Book-keepers, Payroll Managers & Wages Clerks'** continue to attract sustained demand.

- There is also notable demand for **'Early Education and Childcare Practitioners.'**

- The Health & Social Care sector continues to have demand for **'Social Workers.**

- In the Engineering sector for **'Plant & Machine Operatives'** remain sought after.

- Demand for **'Vehicle Mechanics and Electricians'** in the Motor Trade are also 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 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.