

Recommendations: Good Work and Good Health

Good work is a powerful determinant of health. Secure, fairly paid, inclusive and fulfilling work supports physical and mental wellbeing, reduces poverty, and strengthens communities. However, the levels of economic inactivity, poor mental health, and work-limiting health conditions seen locally indicate that incremental or individual-level approaches alone are insufficient. Systemic change is required to make good work the norm and to ensure that employment is accessible, sustainable and health-promoting for all residents.

1. Create inclusive, safe and discrimination-free workplaces

All employers should take action to actively identify and eliminate stigma and discrimination in the workplace, including discrimination related to disability, long-term health conditions, mental ill health, caring responsibilities, age, ethnicity, sex, gender identity and socioeconomic background.

This requires more than policies alone. Employers should:

- Foster workplace cultures where people feel psychologically safe to disclose health conditions, disabilities or caring responsibilities without fear of disadvantage.
- Embed fair recruitment, progression and pay practices, including transparency in job design and decision-making.
- Ensure managers are trained and supported to challenge discriminatory behaviours and to apply reasonable adjustments consistently and compassionately.
- Work with employees and trade unions to understand lived experience and co-design improvements.

Inclusive workplaces are more productive and sustainable, and they widen access to work for groups who are currently underrepresented or excluded.

2. Support good mental wellbeing through good work design

All employers should recognise that good work can support good mental health and wellbeing, but that poor-quality work can also cause harm. High workload demands, low job control, insecure hours, lack of autonomy and unsupportive management are well-established risk factors for poor mental health.

Employers should:

- Prioritise good job design, with appropriate workload, autonomy, role clarity and opportunities for progression.
- Support line managers to have regular, meaningful conversations about workload, wellbeing and support needs.
- Promote flexible working as a default, where roles allow, to support work–life balance and retention.
- Ensure access to timely mental health support and clear pathways for employees who are struggling.

Improving mental wellbeing at work should not be seen solely as an individual resilience issue, but as a core organisational responsibility.

3. Anchor organisations should lead by example in providing good work

Anchor organisations across Westmorland and Furness – including the NHS, local government, education providers and large employers – have a critical leadership role to play in reshaping the local labour market.

These organisations should act as exemplars of good work by:

- Designing roles and employment practices that enable people with health conditions, disabilities or caring responsibilities to enter and remain in work.
- Reviewing policies related to recruitment, absence management, flexibility and workplace adjustments

- to remove unnecessary barriers.
- Using their influence in local supply chains to promote good employment standards among contractors and partners.
- Signing up to the new Cumbria Good Employment Charter when it launches next year.

High levels of economic inactivity demonstrate that the current system does not work for many people. Progress will depend on redesigning work and workplaces, rather than relying solely on individual employability or health interventions to “fix” people.

4. Root employment support in communities and strengthen the voluntary and community sector

Support for individuals to access, stay in, or return to work should be community-based and connected to people’s everyday lives. The voluntary, community, social enterprise and faith (VCSEF) sector plays a vital role in providing trusted, culturally sensitive and holistic support, particularly for people facing multiple disadvantages.

Public sector partners should:

- Invest in VCSEF organisations to deliver employment and health-related support that is flexible, relationship-based and locally grounded.
- Recognise that funding employment support through the VCSEF sector also contributes to the sustainability and resilience of the sector itself.
- Enable coordination between community-based services, employers and statutory support to avoid fragmented or duplicative provision.

Community-rooted approaches can reach people who may not engage with traditional services and provide support that addresses wider social and health needs alongside employment goals.

5. Integrate health and work into neighbourhood health plans

Health and work should be embedded within neighbourhood health plans as a shared priority across place-based partnerships. This includes recognising the role of local employers in supporting the health and wellbeing of their workforce and their families, as well as strengthening pathways between employment, health and care services.

Building on the learning from programmes such as Work Well and Connect to Work, the local system should:

- Support employers to contribute to prevention and wellbeing activities within neighbourhoods.
- Improve coordination between primary care, mental health services, social care, employers and employment support services.
- Develop clear, proactive pathways to help people stay in work or return to work following illness, injury, disability or changes in caring responsibilities.

A more integrated approach will help prevent avoidable exits from work, reduce health inequalities, and ensure that health conditions do not unnecessarily limit people’s ability to contribute and thrive.

Conclusion

Delivering good work for good health requires leadership, collaboration and a willingness to change how work is designed and supported. By acting collectively across employers, anchor institutions, communities and health systems, Westmorland and Furness can create a labour market that promotes wellbeing, reduces inequalities and supports inclusive economic prosperity.