

# ANNUAL REPORT

2023 - 2024



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North Dorset Event



Discover Your Future: Skills and Transitions Event



Investor Ready Workshop with Evolve



Cornerstone Employers Event



# FOREWORD

**Planning our next One Health conference has reminded me about how interrelated our world is. One Health emphasises the interconnected health of humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration to prevent and mitigate risks that threaten planetary health.**

We heard a very similar message at our housing conference earlier in the year, where speakers and delegates made the case for the health of our economy inextricably linked to availability of affordable housing which in turn influences our workforce – with many of working age leaving the county to take on jobs in areas with more affordable accommodation.

Both conferences have further highlighted the benefits of working at scale. A recent independent report, commissioned by both Dorset & BCP councils describes the advantages of working at a Functional Economic Market Area scale to deliver infrastructure development such as housing, which the report confirms as being the whole county. Other economic developments are less bounded but require an even larger scale, as businesses take advantage of working in the Solent economic area and the Great South West.

Some highlights this year include our team at the



Homes & The Economy Conference

Digital Skills Hub in Boscombe being recognised with a national award for the work they are doing to benefit the community of Boscombe, providing learning opportunities for residents and businesses principally around technology adoption. Further recognition came in May this year as the team were awarded a special Partner of the Year Award by Seetec Pluss.

Our Careers team led a Dorset-wide project that sought to create greater employment opportunities across the region for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) by increasing the number of Disability Confident Employers. Two Dorset employers, Marsham Court Hotel and The Crumbs Project, received special recognition for their commitment in gaining Disability Confident Leader status as a result of their involvement in the 2023 Removing Barriers project.

In a bid to spread the message of the opportunities in the county, we launched "Invest in Dorset", with



Digital Skills Hub Award

a new website to provide insight into Dorset's key priority sectors. The site outlines the excellent business opportunities in the county, provides information on Business support and aims to be a resource for potential investors.

As a member of the Great South West (GSW) Board, I joined a delegation including Local Authority and business leaders making the case for investment in the region, at the UK's largest investment convention (UKREiIF), attended by over 10,000+ delegates. Over 3 days, we led discussion sessions that provided insights into the region's unique strengths in sectors critical to the success of the UK's economy.

Since the formation of Dorset LEP in 2011 it has been our mission to bring together business, education and local government leaders, to drive sustainable economic prosperity for Dorset. While the role, remit and funding of Dorset LEP has changed over this time the central premise



Removing Barriers - The Crumbs Project

of a strong local partnership, bringing different perspectives together with a common goal of securing economic prosperity for our area, has remained constant.

The end of the FY 23/24 brought further expected change to the LEP landscape. For the remainder of 2024, we continue to work with our partners and Board to establish a sustainable future delivery model for the valued work delivered by Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership – read more of this in the Going Forward section.

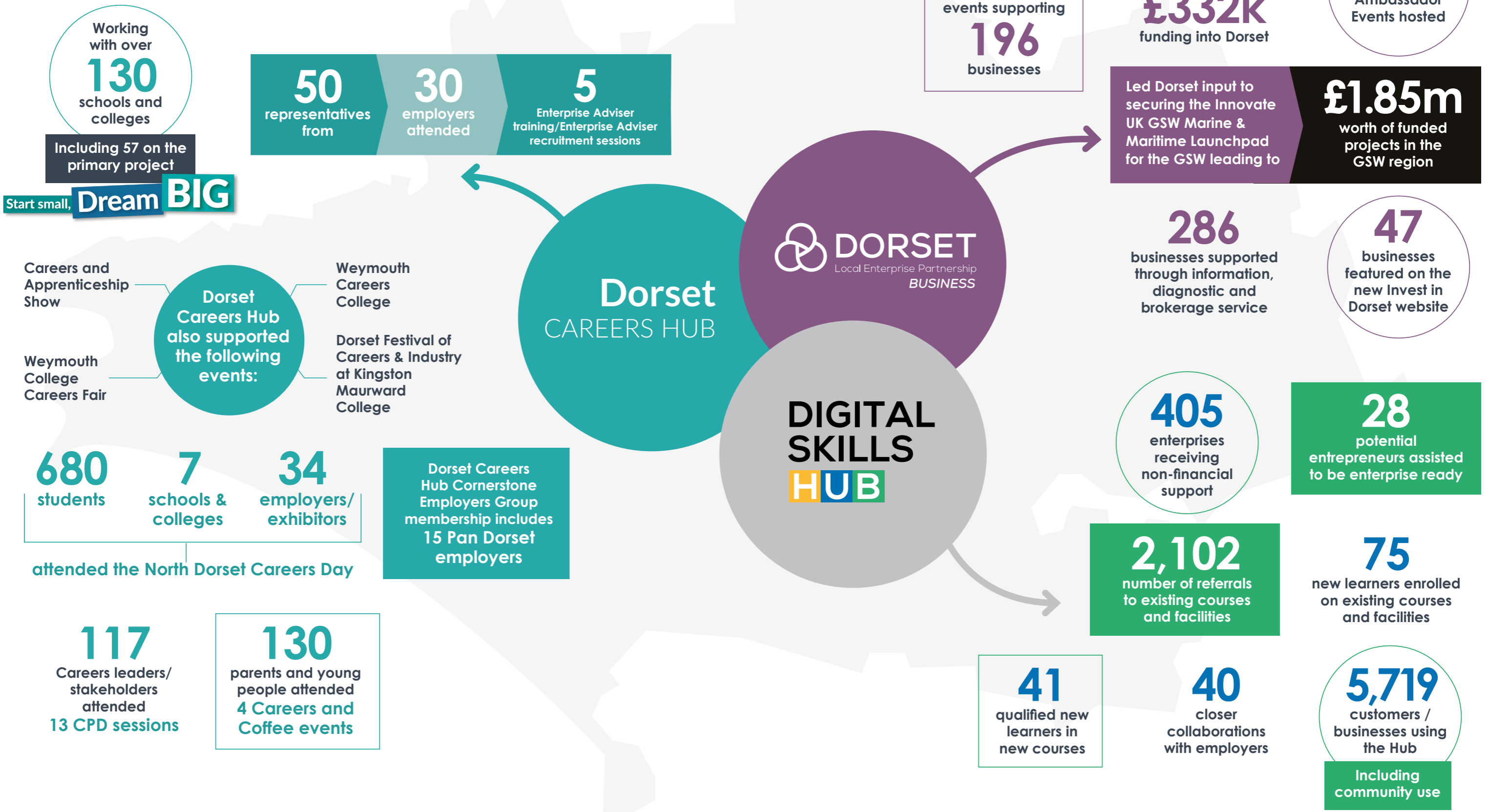
Our immediate focus is to continue to work on an economic strategy for Dorset. The aim is to articulate a shared sense of direction for the area by communicating our collective ambitions and identifying investment priorities.

I'd like to thank all our partners for their continued support, we look forward to working with you in 2024.

**Cecilia Buffon**  
Chair, Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership



# 2023-2024 IN NUMBERS



# STRATEGY & INSIGHT

**Our core functions include identifying strategic economic priorities and ensuring business perspectives are understood and heard by policy and decision makers.**

We do this through data and contextual analysis, relationship building to keep an ear on the ground, and by working in partnership to bring representatives from different sectors together to maintain a common understanding and focus on the issues in our area that have an impact on the economy.

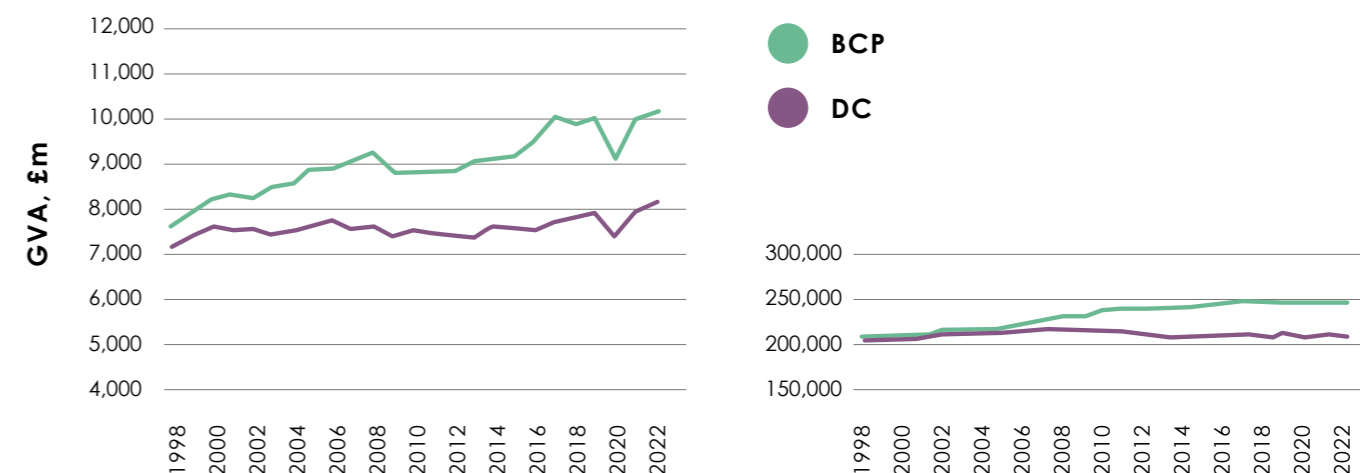
Dorset LEP has co-ordinated and published economic strategies since its inception in 2011 – for example a Strategic Economic Plan, a Strategic Economic Vision, and the Local Industrial Strategy. We support others with their strategies, for example supporting the development of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), and regularly develop and publish labour market insights on our website. In 2023-24 we set up and continue to convene an Economic Intelligence Network for the Great South West, bringing together Local Authority officers with economic analysis functions together with Office for National Statistics (ONS) regional representatives and others.

In 2023-24, Dorset LEP began work on an up to date economic evidence base for the area. Since the publication of the Local Industrial Strategy of 2019, there have been a number of economic shocks internationally and nationally. It was timely to have a fresh look at economic indicators to understand both weaknesses and strengths that have emerged or are longstanding and to understand the opportunities for intervention or investment in the Dorset area.

Slow growth and poor productivity have been national issues for some time, exacerbated by the COVID pandemic, Brexit and the war in Ukraine. However, in our area, looking at the trend of the last 20 years, both the Dorset and BCP council

areas have been performing below the South West and national averages. Looking back over 20 years, we found a correlation between the relative size of the working age population (which we took as those aged 16 to 65) and economic growth. The data shows that, roughly speaking, when our working age population flatlines so does our economic growth. A striking thing about the population of the Dorset LEP area is a higher than average and growing percentage of older people compared to a steady number, and so shrinking percentage, of working age people. In the Dorset Council area in particular, this has worked its way into the next generation with fewer children coming through. Understanding the drivers and consequences of our population statistics is a good starting point for planning for economic growth. Employers need a workforce.

Having started the refresh of our evidence base, Department for Business and Trade (DBT) have subsequently asked all bodies responsible for delivering LEP functions to publish up to date economic strategic documents for their functional areas by mid 2024/25 highlighting economic priorities and opportunities on a ten year timeframe. We will continue with this work into the next financial year (2024/25) to prepare a draft economic strategy document for consultation.



GVA between 1998 and 2021 by Local Authority (2019 money value). Source: ONS, Regional Gross Value Added (balanced) by industry: City and Regions

Number of people aged 16-64. Source: ONS Mid-year population estimates

# REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

**As a partnership organisation Dorset LEP recognises the value of working collaboratively with organisations outside of the county, to deliver maximum impact.**

We know that our region can be at the forefront of tackling some of humanity's biggest challenges, pioneering new approaches to healthy ageing, food production and climate change and that this needs to be done whilst protecting and enhancing our world-class environment.

LEP Board members and staff are actively engaged with many partnership organisations, clusters and hubs across the South West, Solent and beyond, working to share best practice, network and share ideas and drive investment.

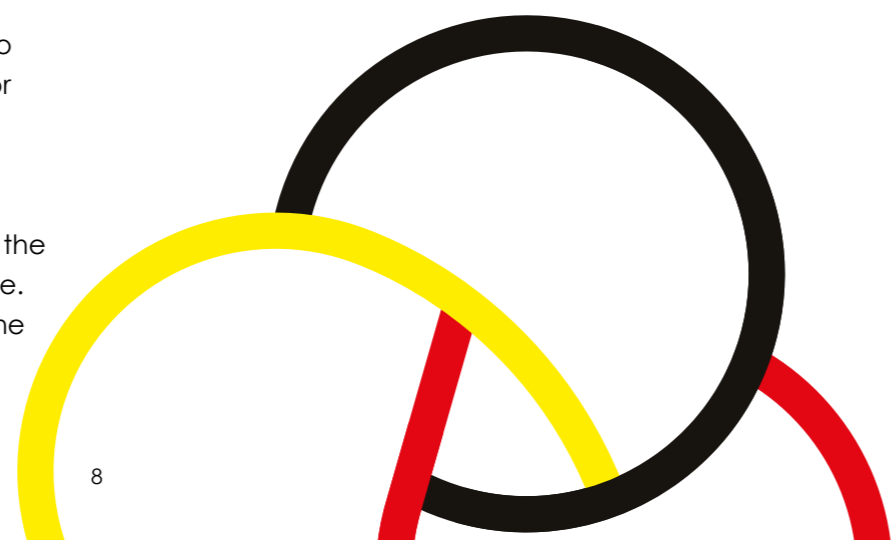
Our membership of the Great South West Pan Regional Partnership (GSW) exemplifies this approach, offering a forum for representatives from business, universities, councils and Local Enterprise Partnerships, operating across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Devon, Dorset and Somerset. With a focus on delivering a prosperous future for all our communities, the GSW Board works with

Government and champions our incredible region on a national and international level.

Now in its second year since formal recognition, Programme Boards have been established for the following sectors/activities:

- Trade and Investment
- Marine
- High-Value Manufacturing
- Tourism
- Energy
- Food, Farming and Fishing
- Enablers
- Innovation

A full list of our local and regional partnerships can be found on our [website](#).



# HOMES & THE ECONOMY CONFERENCE 2024

To unpick and better contextualise some of our emerging findings from our data driven evidence work, we convened a “Homes and the Economy” conference in February 2024, bringing together academic, public sector and private sector experience and expertise to consider the linkages between housing and the economy.

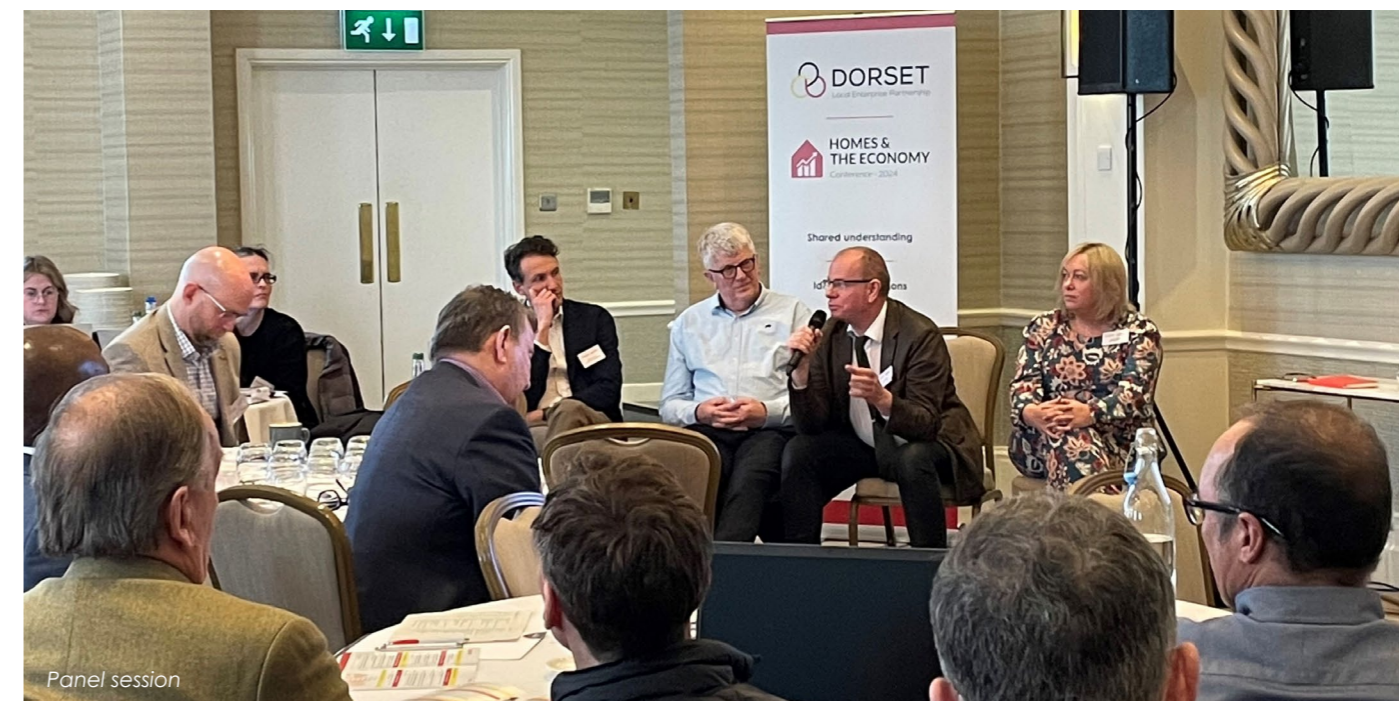
Our keynote speaker, Duncan MacLellan (Emeritus Professor, University of Glasgow), set the scene outlining how the British housing market – and that of some other countries – is distorted by an attitude towards housing as investment rather than as a place to live and raise a family. This affects individual investment choices, pushes up prices and ties up capital in property that could otherwise be in other parts of the economy, for example reducing availability of capital for start-ups or innovation.

Around the country, locations that are attractive holiday or retirement destinations have seen housing costs rise higher than other areas. In the Dorset and BCP areas, the average house costs 11 times the average annual salary. Housing costs affect where people at different life stages choose or are able to live. Conference delegates illustrated the difficulty for young people to find a home in the area they grew up in with some who are employers highlighting their difficulty in retaining graduates or recruiting early to mid-career employees with the cost of housing being a factor.

The event kick started a multi-sectoral conversation about a topic affecting many parts of the country but with particular issues in our area. Second, empty, or underoccupied homes were highlighted as contributory to the housing issues in the area. Increased supply of affordable housing was considered as part of the solution. However, it was noted that while there were a lot of planning consents in place, a recent Competitions and Market Commission report suggested that house builders restricted the rate of supply to keep prices up. Examples of solutions from the social landlord sector and from other parts of the country were also discussed. The conference concluded that having the right sort and enough homes is important for our economy, our businesses and our communities.

Slides of the presentations from the event can be found [here](#).

A film of the day's events can be seen [here](#).



	Median (March 2023)	Lower Quartile (March 2023)	Ratio of median house price (existing dwellings) to median gross annual workplace earnings (2022)	Ratio of lower quartile house prices (existing dwellings) to lower quartile gross annual workplace earnings
BCP	£343,000	£247,000	10.3	9.6
DC	£350,000	£255,000	11.5	10.69
South West	£310,000	£190,000	9.41	9.13
England	£290,000	£230,000	8.28	7.29

Source: House Price Statistics for Small Areas (HPSSAs), ONS

# DORSET LEP BUSINESS

**Dorset LEP was awarded Growth Hub funds by the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) to provide a dedicated business support function for Dorset in 2023/24.**

Through this we are able to deliver a free service, offering advice and support for businesses within the county, including providing them with business diagnostics and signposting to the most appropriate commercial or public funded assistance available to help them grow.

Our primary objectives were to contribute to the strategic direction of the current and future business support provision across the county including Shared Prosperity Fund Programmes; and to help businesses to access opportunities for growth and increase their resilience against

the impact of economic shocks. Our Dorset LEP Business support programme focused on business growth, productivity, access to finance and innovation. We continued to work very closely with local and national business support providers across the public and private sector. We worked alongside the local authorities to ensure interventions add capacity and value to the local business support ecosystem. Collaboration with DBT underscores Dorset LEP's global perspective, encouraging connections between local businesses and initiatives such as the Export Academy.



Ambassador Business Breakfast

## Key highlights for Dorset LEP Business for 23/24 include:

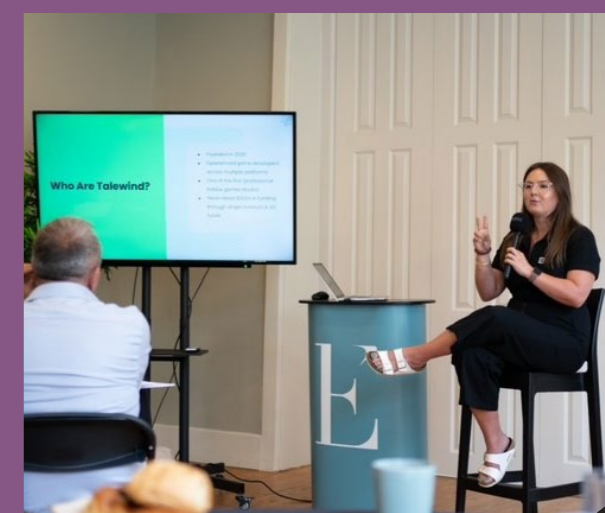
- Delivered business growth programmes supporting a total of **196 businesses** including:
  - 4 Business Growth & Productivity Groups
  - 2 Innovation Programmes
  - Horizon Scanning Service
  - Bid Writing Support - 7 bids supported including 3 Innovate UK with 6 successful bids bringing a total of £332k grant funding into Dorset
  - 3 Bid Writing Masterclasses
  - 5 Funding & Investment Readiness Workshops
  - 4 Businesses on a Funding Accelerator Programme (part-funded)
  - 5 Strategic Business Review Programmes
  - Business Scale-up Programme
- Launched the British Business Bank's South West Investment Fund in Dorset
- Delivered an inbound enquiry service with provision of information, diagnostic and brokerage service including signposting to relevant support both from Dorset LEP and local / regional partners to 286 businesses
- Led Dorset input to securing the Innovate UK GSW Marine & Maritime Launchpad for the GSW, co-designed the programme and launched the Round 1 call in Dorset leading to £1.85m worth of funded projects in the GSW region
- Delivered the Regional Angel Network Development Programme in Dorset with Tech South West
- Launched the Fintech West South Coast Hub with BCP Council
- Launched the brand-new website Invest in Dorset
- Made significant updates to the Dorset LEP website to enable businesses to find the key information and support they require



Bid writing masterclass



British Business Bank SWIF launch



Funding & Investment Readiness with Evolve

## Business Growth & Productivity Groups

Dorset LEP commissioned a Business Growth & Productivity Group programme with Evolve and **provided support to 40 SMEs across four groups.** This fully funded programme which attracted business from the Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing, Marine and Maritime, Digital Creative and Visitor Economy sectors explored a range of key themes that could make a positive difference for participants and the companies they are responsible for. The programme saw the creation of four facilitated peer groups that comprised of high-growth or high-growth potential SMEs based in Dorset. Topics covered growth strategies, financial resilience, recruitment and retention, leadership and management and net-zero solutions.

## Funding & Investment Readiness Programme

Five workshops including a pilot and two each focussed on start-up and growth businesses. Topics were tailored to the audience and included information and guidance on various capital sources, helping businesses understand where funds can come from and how to tap into them. Information was included on alternative financing, including platforms like Kickstarter and Crowdfunding, to broaden their funding horizons. Topics also included business planning, financial forecasting, designing and pitching to investors, legal and tax considerations including Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) & Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme (SEIS).

## Strategic Business Review Programmes

**Five businesses were supported** on this one-to-one, individually tailored programme for high growth businesses during 2023-2024. Split into three key stages, Stage 1 involved undertaking a review of the recent financial history/KPI's and understanding the business. Stage 2 was a facilitated day at The Evolve Hub where Directors and relevant senior managers were in attendance. Stage 3 was an advisory report which summarised the outcomes from Stage 2 and considered next steps.

### CASE STUDY



Cecile Trissengar participated in the Customer Connection Lab innovation workshop facilitated by Silicon South.

Cecile's company, Stories for Wellbeing, is a preventative, intellectual Wellbeing Programme which aims to transform staff from stress and potential burnout into calm, confident and empowered employees. With ambitious growth goals, the workshop was instrumental in broadening Cecile's understanding of customer needs beyond initial perceptions, revealing aspects of her business that need consideration and attention to provide buyers with a compelling proposition.

Having chosen to locate her business in Dorset with its vibrant, creative community, Cecile has seen enhanced sales performance since attending the workshop and noted *"I feel very supported as a solopreneur here (financially, resource and knowledge-base-wise). There's a really positive atmosphere around starting businesses in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole."*

## Funding Accelerator Programme

We believe everyone should have the opportunity to grow their business so **Dorset LEP part-funded four spaces on this funding accelerator by Focused for Business.** Focused for Business' mission is to demystify the investment process, break down barriers and create a level playing field. Their focus is on giving businesses the tools and techniques they need to encourage investors to back the business.

## Innovation Programmes

Working with Silicon South and Evolve this programme saw **40 businesses receive advice, guidance and support** to help them identify opportunities for innovation within their business and develop a plan to achieve those innovation goals.

## Bid Writing Support

Dorset LEP provides a fully funded, specialist bid writing support service to help more Dorset entrepreneurs, SMEs and projects access government funds to power their business growth, increase collaborations and drive innovation. Delivered by Brooks Kebbey, this incorporates the horizon scanning service and bid writing masterclasses and, since its launch, the service has helped Dorset businesses and projects **secure more than £2m of funding** from the likes of Innovate UK. In 2023/2024 our **bid writing support service led to seven funding applications with six successful bids** and bringing a **total of £332K grant funding** into Dorset.

## Scale Up Programmes

Our relationship with Evelyn Partners continued into 2023 with the provision of an exclusive, invitation only, tailored programme of Scale Up support to high-growth businesses. We promoted the work of the Scale Up Institute and, where appropriate, we signposted businesses to other Scale Up programmes such as those run by Innovate UK Business Growth.



Accelerator Programme



## Invest in Dorset

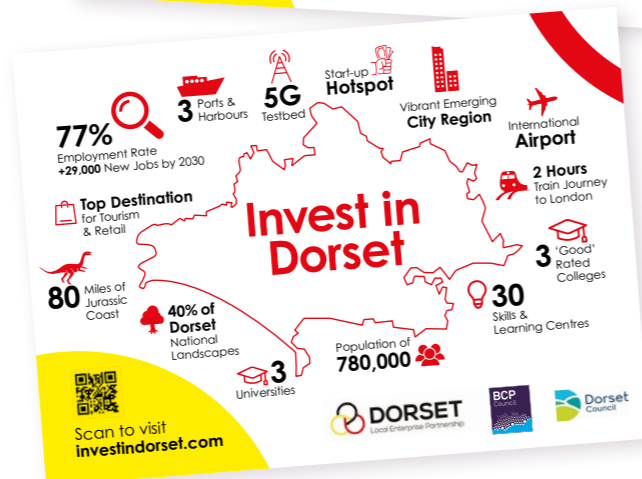
Invest in Dorset's mission is to bring businesses and stakeholders together to drive investment and growth in this attractive county. Dorset's economy is fuelled by innovation and the county provides excellent business support and a great quality of life. **With a total Gross Value Added (GVA) value of almost £20 billion Dorset is an outstanding area of the UK for business.** Strengthened by the Great South West UK's Natural Powerhouse region comprising of Dorset, Somerset, Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, **the area boasts a £64 billion economy and three million people.**

Dorset LEP promotes Dorset as a highly attractive investment region and helps local businesses access global markets. Working with the Department for Business and Trade we continue to develop this relationship through both the export and foreign direct investment arms. This relationship is managed through the Inward Investment team - a subgroup of the LEP that is led by the Head of Business Growth & Inward Investment.

To promote the Invest in Dorset brand Dorset LEP, in partnership with BCP Council and Dorset Council, launched a brand-new website ([www.investindorset.com](http://www.investindorset.com)) which showcases a range of businesses across six key priority sectors in addition to the six main education establishments in the county.

The site also provides access to business support and resources. Key sectors include:

- Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing
- Agritech & Aquaculture
- Digital Creative
- Defence & Security
- Financial Services
- Marine & Maritime



## Dorset Ambassador Network

Dorset is home to a wealth of sector-leading, national and international businesses, many of whom are headquartered here and there is a strong culture of enterprise and innovation within the area.

Dorset Ambassadors are business people from all sectors across Dorset, who are passionate about being located and doing business in Dorset. Also represented are Local Authorities, partners and stakeholders. They share a belief that further economic growth, more high-quality jobs and improved skills are good for Dorset businesses, residents and the economy.

Dorset Ambassadors volunteer their valuable time, highlighting the opportunities that arise from doing business in Dorset helping to grow the economy and increase prosperity locally. The network aims to promote Dorset as a place to live, work and invest; inspire other business leaders, stakeholders, partners and young people; influence local and regional decision making and encourage business growth and inward investment.



## CASE STUDY Rumage



Jo Spolton of Rumage participated in the Funding Accelerator programme run by Focused for Business. Rumage, a search engine for everything preloved and refurbished, was founded in 2017 and is based in Dorset which enables the company, focused on sustainability, to reduce their carbon footprint by remote working.

Struggling to present their business opportunity to investors, Jo found the programme's access to specialist mentors helped her create a concise, clear and compelling narrative around her business. The weekly nature of the programme gave her the discipline and accountability to achieve her goals and with access to a specialist database, Jo could gain insights into her sector and identify a 'hit list' of investors to approach.

Jo was invited by Dorset Business Angels to pitch to their network after practising at the Funding Accelerator Pitch Day. "It was brilliant" she said. "Every time you pitch, especially when you pitch in person, you get a better feel for how engaged investors actually are. I felt more confident pitching having already done a "dummy run" on Funding Accelerator."

Jo has only just launched her funding round and has already secured commitments of £40k. She said "Funding Accelerator has given me some of the best information I've had access to. I would recommend it as one of the best funding programmes available, and all I can say is I wished I'd done it earlier!"



# SKILLS

## Enhancing Skills in Dorset: The Strategic Role of the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership

At the heart of our economic and social development are skills – a skilled workforce, skilled people to teach our young people, those with creative, innovative skills and much more. Dorset LEP provides key support to the skills system in the county, as well as delivering programmes to enable growth, resilience, and prosperity.

Dorset boasts a diverse economy with strengths in sectors such as advanced engineering, digital and creative industries, health and social care, and tourism. However, like many regions, it faces challenges such as an ageing population, skills shortages in key areas, and the need to attract and retain young talent.

Skills required by employers are constantly updating. As priorities and technologies change, so do the skills required to adapt to the different demands. Capturing and sharing the labour market information specifically for Dorset enables the county to plan and develop skills provision that meets business need. Working with Dorset Chamber, this data has been part of the underpinning work of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), created to support Dorset businesses to have the right people doing the right jobs with the right skills. The LSIP will work to provide appropriate post-16 technical education to meet the skills needed in business.

As a system, the skills provision works best when collaboration and knowledge of other providers comes together. Dorset Skills Board is convened by the LEP, and chaired by Nicola Newman, LEP Board member and Dorset Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) LSIP lead. This group brings together senior leaders from business, education, and local government to provide strategic direction on skills development. This Board plays a critical role in aligning local skills provision with economic needs and has responsibility for oversight of the LSIP and its review processes.

Working with partner organisations, Dorset LEP delivers programmes that directly link learners with business. Dorset Careers Hub (DCH) works with all 82 senior schools across the county, providing critical support for careers leaders, senior leadership teams and governing bodies. Delivering a range of CPD, business knowledge and practical support and events, DCH aims to help young people into the world of work. Dorset Careers Hub plays a vital role in equality and diversity, with a key focus on ensuring career and work opportunities for everyone (read more on page 20).



The Digital Skills Hub (DSH) in Boscombe, delivered by Dorset LEP and funded by BCP Council, offers residents and businesses the opportunity to upskill, challenge themselves, find resolutions to problems and grow. Celebrating the graduation of its first Business Accelerator at the Digital Skills Hub, Evolve as delivery partner said *“The first running of this free programme helped dozens of business owners in the digital, creative and tech sectors to enhance their operations, develop new skills, network and access funding opportunities.”* (read more on page 24).

Through active engagement with local employers to understand their needs, we are able to signpost to talent pathways and bespoke courses via Skills Boot Camps, funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and delivered in Dorset in partnership with

Somerset Council. Driving delivery of this funding in Dorset and working with partner organisations has secured bespoke course delivery for SME’s enabling upskilling of the workforce, as well as 12-week resident focused courses directly aligned to available jobs. This collaboration ensures that training programs are relevant and impactful.

By addressing skills shortages and aligning education with business needs, the LEP has helped to create a more resilient and adaptable workforce. The focus on inclusive growth ensures that all residents can benefit from these developments. In turn, this attracts new businesses to the area, boosts productivity, and enhances the overall economic prosperity of Dorset.



Digital Skills Hub in Boscombe



**Match funded by Dorset LEP with the Careers & Enterprise Company, we deliver Dorset Careers Hub which strives to ensure young people across Dorset have access to the high-quality careers education and opportunities to link with and learn from employers from all sectors.**

Working across Dorset LEP, BCP Council and Dorset Council, our aim is to drive improvement, support transitions and address barriers for those that are disadvantaged.

Our strategy, supported by a steering group of key external partners, supports schools to achieve the **Gatsby Benchmarks** and offers employers meaningful opportunities to engage with the next generation. Our activities consider the needs of all stakeholders and respond to local

priorities, including the outcomes of the Local Skills Improvement Plan.

As part of a national network of 44 Careers Hubs, we are informed by national and local data alongside feedback from partners. We evaluate the impact of our delivery and respond to changes in the careers education landscape. We are committed to engaging with and listening to young people and this insight underpins the decisions we make about how, when and what we deliver.

## Dorset Workplace Experiences

In January 2024, Dorset Careers Hub began a partnership with Dorset Chamber of Commerce and Industry to strive to ensure every young person in Dorset has access to opportunities that allow them to experience the world of work. The collaboration supports employers to work alongside the future workforce to provide an insight into the breadth of jobs within the many sectors represented across Dorset. As evidenced in the Local Skills Improvement Plan, workplace experiences are vital for young people to develop work-readiness skills and gain insights to inform career decisions.

The initial nine-month investment will share the benefits of employers providing a progressive offer that caters for all ages while developing the Dorset WorkEx Directory to support schools to link with organisations that host engaging and innovative placements.

**Join Dorset employers to influence the next generations' workforce**

From two hours to two weeks, all workplace opportunities prepare young people to transition from school to work

**When Employers interact with Young People they:**

- Build their future talent pipeline
- Gain insight into youth perspectives
- Address skills shortages
- Raise the profile of their business
- Inspire and give back to their local community

**Make a difference and create meaningful and high-quality interactions**



[Click here to get involved >](#)

[dorsetchamber.co.uk/workex](https://dorsetchamber.co.uk/workex)  
[dorsetcareershub.co.uk](https://dorsetcareershub.co.uk)  
[workex@dorsetchamber.co.uk](mailto:workex@dorsetchamber.co.uk)

**Dorset**  
CAREERS HUB

THE **CAREERS & ENTERPRISE**  
COMPANY



## Removing Barriers Project

Dorset Careers Hub secured additional investment to deliver the Removing Barriers Project in partnership with sendme2work. The year long programme aimed to improve employment opportunities for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). With a view to opening their doors and becoming more inclusive, eleven local employers embarked on the project and in-person training was delivered by 14 facilitators from eight delivery partners.

The project was completed in September 2023 with the number of Disability Confident Employers across Dorset increasing by 24% and those with Leader status growing from one to six. The work and achievements of the Marsham Court Hotel and The Crumbs Project who participated in Removing Barriers has been recognised locally and nationally and we have seen them taking responsibility for influencing other local employers. A smaller scale project extension ran into 2024 to disseminate learning and showcase the successes of the project to other local employers via face-to-face and online training and the development of The Employer Toolkit for Disability Confidence.



**sendme2work**  
inclusion within the workspace

## CASE STUDY - DORSET MARVELS

Dorset LEP secured funding from the Careers and Enterprise Company to deliver targeted support for disadvantaged young people at points of transition. Delivered over two years to young people in Year 10 and 11, the project enabled them to transition and sustain engagement in a post-16 destination. Branded Dorset Marvels, the project focussed on young people with multidimensional risk factors in mainstream and specialist provision who were at risk of, or have experienced, exclusion. Research showed this group was four times more likely to become not engaged with education, employment or training. We identified young people with. Due to the complex support needs, the activities of our project centred on the delivery of fortnightly careers adviser meetings. The frequency and flexibility of these meetings was a key success feature.

Pupils accessed 1-2-1 and group activities including coaching, identification of goals and specialist sessions with qualified careers advisors. A key part of the project focus was on employer encounters, work-related skills plus a one-week paid placement in Year 11, to deepen their understanding and knowledge of the workplace and sector and build confidence over time.

The project impact report shows 95.7% of young people on the programme entered a post-16 destination, and 83.8% had sustained their education and training in Spring 2024.

93.3% of pupils reported they had ideas about which jobs fit their interests and skills, could identify a career that would allow them to live the life they want to lead and were confident that they could apply knowledge of courses and jobs to their own situation. Working with each student holistically as an individual providing intensive career counselling was a key success factor of the project, and one that has enabled talented young people to start their career journey.

## Start small, Dream BIG

### Working with Employers

Alongside bespoke Workplace Experience activity, Dorset Careers Hub continues to support schools to engage with the world of work through building a robust network of Enterprise Advisers and facilitating the additional commitments pledged by the Cornerstone Employer group.

Cornerstone Employers are a business of any size that provides high quality careers outreach and opportunities for young people aligned to the local economy.

Support for employers was strengthened this year with the introduction of the Careers and Enterprise Company's Employer Standards Framework which enables organisations of all sizes to understand best practice in careers education outreach. Twelve local employers used the reflective self-assessment tool to measure themselves against nine standards during the roll-out and then worked with the Careers Hub to diagnose strengths and opportunities of their programmes.

### Parent Engagement – Careers & Coffee Sessions

During the Autumn Term and in partnership with Dorset Skills and Training Partnership Network (DSTPN), we delivered four Careers and Coffee sessions in Wimborne, Weymouth, Poole and Sturminster Newton.

**140 parents and young people attended the sessions**, which were held within local community settings on Saturday mornings. These informal events shared information about the intricacies of applying for apprenticeships as well as an overview of the other technical qualifications on offer within Dorset colleges and providers. We were delighted to see many of the parents and young people at subsequent Dorset Careers Hub events – all of whom shared how beneficial they had found the initial Careers and Coffee sessions, and how the information they had received had helped them to be better placed to navigate the apprenticeship recruitment process.

### Start Small; Dream Big – Primary Project

Dorset are proud to be one of the first fifteen Careers Hubs across the country participating in the pilot of Start Small; Dream Big, a primary career-related learning programme. The scheme, which runs through to 2025, encourages young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to dream big about their future careers and aspire to the breadth of opportunities available.

In the first six months of the Dorset pilot, to March 2024, **32 schools** were supported to develop a strategic learning programme designed to give all learners the knowledge to succeed, challenge stereotypes and broaden their horizons. With parents, careers leads and governors involved in delivery, **over 240 primary age children** have increased their knowledge of Dorset's local labour market and have considered the link between what they learn in school and how this can be utilised in the workplace. Schools are given tools to link with local employers and host encounters and showcase relatable role models from the workplace, which further allows exploration of jobs and skills.

### CASE STUDY

*"Working with Primary Education Providers and their pupils has been really impactful so far for Tilbury Douglas...The young people have been engaged, enthusiastic, and have asked some brilliant questions!"*

*... By getting involved at key stage 1 and 2, we are able to challenge stereotypes and promote the vast opportunities that people aren't aware of in the industry in areas such as technology and sustainability...*

*As a business and industry, we have a large challenge filling positions and some worrying statistics predict we need over 250,000 extra construction workers by 2028 (CITB). By hopefully inspiring younger students to join the industry we can safeguard it for the future."*  
Phoebe Gale – Social Value Co-ordinator for Tilbury Douglas

### Supporting SEND and Disadvantaged Young People

**Over 30% of all schools and colleges supported by Dorset Careers Hub are just for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).** Across the South-West region we have a higher number of SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) schools than any of our neighbours.

This has meant that we have realigned our approach to ensure that we are better placed to meet the needs of this group of young people, parents and teachers. To start the process, **we invited 130 careers leaders, teachers, and representatives** from both local authorities and charities to attend an inaugural, 'SEND Forum - Raising and Achieving Aspirations' in July 2023. We were aware of many

different projects happening across the county and wanted to provide a forum for colleagues to share and learn about the different providers and projects.

Feedback from the Forum showed there was genuine interest to continue to share good practice and discuss the very specific issues that SEND young people and their parents face, especially regarding the different transition opportunities and decisions and how they affect careers and life choices.

During the Autumn Term, we held a virtual SEND careers leaders event that **16 representatives**

**from 12 SEND schools attended.** The teachers who attended the North Dorset Careers fair reported how well the 'Golden Hour' just for SEND and AP students had been received and requested the idea could be expanded into an event just for SEND young people.

This idea has developed into a bespoke SEND Transitions Careers Fair and a request for a 2nd SEND Forum. Whilst planning for both of these specific events is ongoing, Dorset Careers Hub continues to ensure that across our all of our delivery and within our strategic planning, the needs of our disadvantaged, vulnerable and SEND young people will be at the forefront of everything we do.

### SEND Careers Forum Raising and Achieving Aspirations

Designed to Support the Development of Careers Education Programmes in Special Schools and Alternative Provisions.

Tuesday 11th July 2023 | 09.30 – 15.00 | Lytchett Minster School



- Who should attend?**
- Careers Leaders
  - Senior Leadership Teams
  - SENCOs and CLs in Mainstream Settings
  - Work Experience Coordinators

- Benefits of Participating**
- ✓ Be Inspired and Learn from Experts
  - ✓ Meet Product and Service Providers
  - ✓ Network with Community Colleagues
  - ✓ Share Best Practice

**Keynote Speaker**  
Jenny Connick

**TALENTINO**

- Also on the Agenda**
- Work Experience
  - Parental Engagement
  - Supported Internships

For more information contact:  
dorsetcareershub@bournemouth.ac.uk

Register **HERE** >



# DIGITAL SKILLS HUB

The Digital Skills Hub, which opened on Boscombe High Street in July 2023 has had a highly successful and productive year, providing free education and advice to local residents and businesses aiming to enhance their digital skills.

Funded by the BCP Council Towns Fund, the Hub is operated by Dorset LEP, with a clear mission to combat digital exclusion by offering a welcoming space for anyone seeking to improve their technology knowledge, boost their skills and confidence, and ultimately enrich their personal and professional lives.

Over the past year, the Hub has collaborated with various partners to offer a diverse array of free courses and digital and business advisory services. These include Business Connect Mondays, Community Connect Tuesdays, a



Business Accelerator in partnership with Poole-based business advisory service Evolve, and a series of Digital Discovery courses for beginners and intermediates, conducted by Bournemouth Churches Housing Association and Adult Learning Within Reach.

In March, the Hub was honoured as a winner in the Visa 'Let's Celebrate Towns' awards for its outstanding contributions to the community, making Boscombe one of only seven towns nationwide to receive this recognition. The award included a £15,000 prize, which will be used to fund initiatives aimed at further uplifting and upskilling the Boscombe community. Additionally, in May, the Hub was named Partner of the Year by Seetec for its unwavering dedication to community enhancement through its Community Connect Tuesdays.

## Making a difference locally

Our location, in the heart of Boscombe, has been a significant factor in the success of our skills delivery to the local, diverse population. Located in the community, it is the most important driver in bringing people to our skills delivery, employment opportunities and CPD skills programmes. Opening our 'Community Connect Tuesdays' - all-day drop-in events to provide residents with support services, all in one space - has allowed us to signpost people to the right service for their needs, right here, right now. We have representatives from Job Centre Plus, National Careers Service, Seetec Plus, Family Support Services, Adults Learning Within Reach (WEA), Citizens Advice and the Community Action Network to help solve, direct and support people

**Community Connect Tuesdays at the HUB**

Are you looking for:

- Career guidance?
- Job search advice?
- Connections with local employers?
- Confidence boosting workshops?
- Volunteering opportunities?
- Job interview training?
- Community support?

**Community Connect Tuesdays at the Digital Skills Hub offers all of this and more for FREE!**

Turn over for more details...

Find us at:  
30-32 Royal Arcade, Christchurch Road, Bournemouth, BH1 4BT

info@digitalskillshub.org.uk  
digitalskillshub.org.uk

**DIGITAL SKILLS HUB**

In Partnership With: BCP, Dorset, Nelson, Bournemouth, Bournemouth Council, Bournemouth and Poole Council, Bournemouth and Poole Council, Bournemouth and Poole Council

with all services in one space. Rather than residents having to travel across the conurbation to seek help visiting the different services in their 'normal' locations, they are able to see all the providers relevant to personal, work and skills support in one location.

## Community Connect Tuesdays

**Community Connect Tuesdays** are now extremely popular and directly contribute to full cohorts on our entry-level digital skills, intermediate level digital skills, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) with digital skills, ESOL with employability courses and more. National Careers Service has been so popular, we are now running bespoke CV writing at our confidence-building workshops on Fridays as part of our training suite for residents. Community Connect Tuesdays have led to us delivering recruitment and retention events for businesses locally - highlighting the supply of trained, talented people available for work - as well as support with business-focused excel courses and courses aimed at employability.

**BEGINNER**

**Digital Discovery Course**

The Digital Discovery Course for Beginners is a fun, free and interesting five-week course for anyone looking to gain confidence in basic online and Windows 10 computer skills, web browsing, security, and online money saving advice.

Amongst other skills, the course will teach you:

- Keyboard and mouse proficiency
- Computer navigation, emailing & internet access
- Computer security & keeping safe online
- Online money saving and budgeting

Start dates: 18 April, 6 June, 18 July

When: Thursdays from 10am-1pm

Where: Digital Skills Hub, 30-32 Royal Arcade, Christchurch Road, Bournemouth BH1 4BT

To book your place, phone or text Andy: 07929 709 905 Email: info@lethams@letham.org.uk Or drop in to the Digital Skills Hub

letham learn DIGITAL SKILLS HUB

**INTERMEDIATE**

**Digital Discovery Course**

The Digital Discovery Course for intermediates is a fun, free and interesting five-week course for those who have basic digital knowledge but would like to gain more computer skills and proficiency. Find out what you can do with valuable online tools that will make your life better and easier.

Amongst other skills, the course will teach you:

- Getting to know the Google Suite of tools
- Doing more with the Google Suite of tools
- Using communication tools such as Google Meet, Microsoft Teams and Zoom
- Doing more with your computer

Start dates: 15 April, 3 June, 15 July

When: Mondays from 10am-1pm

Where: Digital Skills Hub, 30-32 Royal Arcade, Christchurch Road, Bournemouth BH1 4BT

To book your place, phone or text Andy: 07929 709 905 Email: info@lethams@letham.org.uk Or drop in to the Digital Skills Hub

letham learn DIGITAL SKILLS HUB

**MICROSOFT OFFICE**

**Digital Discovery Course**

This non-accredited, beginner-friendly course provides a solid foundation in Microsoft Office, perfect for anyone new to the platform or wanting to refresh their skills. Delivered in bite-sized sessions (totalling 16 hours), you'll gain the confidence to:

- Craft eye-catching flyers and documents using Microsoft Word
- Organise and analyse data with ease using spreadsheet basics in Excel
- Create impactful presentations that captivate your audience with PowerPoint
- Master email communication, sending and receiving messages efficiently

Dates: 31 July - 21 Aug, 18 Sept - 9 Oct

When: Wednesdays 10am-2pm

Where: Digital Skills Hub, 30-32 Royal Arcade, Christchurch Road, Bournemouth BH1 4BT

To book your place, scan the QR code or email: leez.gomesey@wrecd.co.uk Or drop in to the Digital Skills Hub

Whitehead Roads Education DIGITAL SKILLS HUB

## Business Connect Mondays

The Digital Skills Hub also supports business owners, allowing them to upskill and develop resilience within the area, providing jobs and promoting retention. **'Business Connect Mondays'** is a drop-in service for business owners, working with the Federation of Small Businesses, UK Shared Prosperity Fund providers, BCP Council Communications and High Street team. As well as an afternoon drop-in, we provide a specialist series of events and support aimed at local businesses, outlined below.

By bringing together skills and employability opportunities for residents and business support, training and CPD we are creating a whole area of resilience, growth and opportunity for everyone.

Our digital and physical promotion of the Hub's skills services extend to the selection of digital skills we currently offer, beginner and intermediate computer courses, wellbeing programmes, CV writing and confidence building workshops

and a number of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses, including one that is exclusively for women.

The Hub's **Digital Skills Workshops** are aimed at enhancing residents' digital literacy, covering everything from basic computer use to advanced internet navigation and online safety, ensuring all community members can confidently engage with the digital world.

Our **ESOL Programmes with Digital Skills** blend English language learning with digital training, tackling both language and digital barriers for non-native speakers, with the goal of widening community integration. We also offer ESOL with Employability, helping with confidence and understanding when entering the world of work in the UK.

Finally, the Hub's **Confidence & Well-being Sessions** focus on the importance of mental health in digital engagement, offering strategies for a balanced online life and promoting safe, healthy technology use.



## Making a difference to local businesses

During 2023/24 the team at The Digital Skills Hub in Boscombe has successfully run a specialist series of programmes and events in support of local business:

- A **Business Accelerator Programme** - run in partnership with Poole-based business advisory service Evolve. This is a year-long programme which provides local businesses with resources, mentoring, and support to encourage growth and innovation.
- **Networking and Directors Discussions – run in partnership with Silicon South.** These events are aimed at local business leaders and provide the opportunity to network, share strategies, and discover digital opportunities, thereby enhancing the local business community's collaborative spirit.
- The **Creative Start-Up Programme** - hosted and supported by partial funding from The Old School House (TOSH). The programme is aimed at empowering local creative entrepreneurs with the necessary tools and resources to flourish.

The events delivered at The Digital Skills Hub focussed on the business skills development services include:

- **Masterclasses** - providing in-depth knowledge on the latest digital strategies and tools, empowering businesses with the insights needed for digital transformation led by industry and academic experts.
- **Business Café drop-ins** - creating a supportive environment for entrepreneurs to gain immediate advice and network, fostering a community of shared learning and collaboration.
- **Business Coaching Workshops** - focus on enabling businesses to effectively integrate digital technologies, thereby enhancing their operational efficiency, market reach, and customer engagement.

The business-related services are promoted via The Digital Skills Hub social media channels, face-to-face engagement, and a dedicated LinkedIn page aimed at the Hub's business offerings.



We believe all these initiatives show our comprehensive approach to boosting digital skills among residents and businesses, equipping them to thrive in the digital era.

# PROGRAMME REVIEW

Since its formation in 2011, Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has invested over £119m in projects across Dorset which has brought £326m of total investment and long term benefit to the region. The scope and impact of our work has been broad and ranges from infrastructure improvements (transport, energy and digital) to investment in education, tourism, research facilities, business and employment space. The projects deliver long term growth and prosperity, more jobs and housing to the region, and underpin Dorset's ongoing resilience and economic development.

## Local Growth Fund (2015-present)

Dorset LEP was awarded a total of  
**£98.4m**  
 capital investment as part of the government's Local Growth Fund (LGF) programme to support regional growth, and to date, this has invested in  
**54 projects**  
 and attracted over  
**£85m**  
 in match-funding.

### A summary of the programme's progress this year:

Even though global events and the cost of living rise posed many challenges to outcome delivery over the past couple of years, the programme is beginning to accelerate its outcome progress. Dorset LEP's biggest programme (Bournemouth International Growth Programme - BIG) infrastructure continues to drive job and commercial floorspace targets. The housing and job delivery is now starting to expedite from the Port of Poole Programme. The skills projects with local Universities and Colleges continue to focus on new learners and apprenticeships, with learning floorspace targets now complete.

Overall, the programme has exceeded job, transport, commercial floorspace and businesses assisted targets for this financial year; with housing, new learners and match funding slightly behind.

The Programme has delivered over £15m of match funding this financial year, making the total to date of over £85m. Further investment from developers at the Bournemouth Airport (BIG Programme) is likely to generate millions of further match funding in the next financial year.

LGF and GBF grant funds have all been allocated and are now closed. However, monitoring and reporting of outcomes continues to the end of March 2025.

For more information on our Local Growth Fund projects visit our [website](#).

## Getting Building Fund (2020-present)

Nationally, the Getting Building Fund (GBF) was targeted in areas facing the biggest economic challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It supported the delivery of shovel-ready infrastructure projects to boost economic growth, and fuel local recovery and jobs.

Dorset LEP invested in nine projects, all of which had a focus on supporting infrastructure and leading to the stimulation of jobs and economic recovery. Our projects looked to develop an uplift in the current skills provision within Dorset and build on existing specialisms in healthcare.

### A summary of the programme's progress this year:

The overall Programme outcome delivery is continuing to progress well. The Programme has met and overdelivered on most outcomes. Overall, the GBF projects continue to be successful, and benefits are being realised with most projects forecasting to meet their targets by March 25.

The £11.8m funding secured by Dorset LEP and further £10.2m of matched funding for our 9 projects helped to:

- Prepare a new trading environment for the end of the UK Transition Period at the Port of Poole.
- Facilitate research, medical innovation and clinical practice enhancements.
- Deliver enhanced digital connectivity full fibre (gigabit) across the Dorset Council spatial area.

For more information on our Getting Building Fund projects visit our [website](#).

## Growing Places Fund (2014-present)

The Growing Places Fund (GPF) was allocated to Local Enterprise Partnerships across England for the establishment of a recoverable and recyclable fund to address constraints to economic growth in their area.

In 2012, Dorset LEP was allocated £9.7m for such schemes and the fund is still open for applications. GPF is designed to unlock capital projects which have a significant economic impact and the potential to increase innovation & productivity, create jobs & housing and deliver tangible economic outcomes.

The fund may also be used where businesses are unable to access alternative funding mechanisms for viable schemes that will deliver economic growth and support Dorset LEP's strategic objectives.

To date, Dorset LEP has invested  
**£17m**  
 across  
**13 projects**

For more information on our Growing Places Fund projects visit our [website](#).

## CASE STUDY: CANFORD RENEWABLE ENERGY

Green hydrogen production facility, Dorset Green H2, is a flagship project in the region and a catalyst for the hydrogen economy in the South West. Overall, this project has benefited from a £8.6 million funding package to enable Poole-based Canford Renewable Energy Ltd to generate hydrogen fuel from on-site, renewable sources.

Unlike many other hydrogen projects which may use fossil fuels to produce the fuel, the Dorset Green H2 facility uses only renewable energy generated by on-site solar and landfill gases to make green hydrogen, a clean, zero-emission fuel.

The site, previously used for landfill, has been used to generate electricity by harnessing naturally occurring methane gases from landfill since 1996. This legacy is now continued through this exciting project.

Green hydrogen power now plays an important role in moving polluting, energy-intensive industries and heavy transport like shipping, HGV lorries and trains, away from fossil fuels. It is recognised by the government as an emission-free fuel for use in vehicles, homes and much more. Producing only water vapour and oxygen as by-products, green hydrogen is a central part of the UK government's plan

to reach net zero, outlined in the UK Hydrogen Strategy published in August 2021.

Hydrogen fuel is recognised as being superior to battery-electric power when it comes to large vehicles, particularly in terms of range and time to re-charge and re-fuel, taking minutes rather than hours. As the green hydrogen economy develops, there are opportunities to decarbonise large vehicle fleets in Dorset.

### In operation since October 2022, the project outputs are:

- Installation of a 5-Megawatt (MW) ground-mounted array of solar panels to supplement electricity produced from the site's existing landfill gas to power the hydrogen facility
- Purchase and installation of a 0.87MW electrolyser which will produce up to 120,000kg of green hydrogen fuel each year to be compressed, stored, and sold for local and regional use as a carbon free fuel.

### Project Outcomes:

- 12 permanent safeguarded jobs
- 120,150 m<sup>2</sup> of commercial/industrial space constructed
- 3,500,000 kg CO<sup>2</sup> emissions saved



# OUR BOARD 2023-2024

**Our Board brings together a wealth of experience from the private, public and education sectors, and collectively, they are our key decision-making body.**

We are fortunate to have Board members whose energy, commitment and wisdom lead the development of our strategic priorities and oversee all our decisions and activities over 2023 - 2024.

We would like to extend our thanks to all those Board Members who have served April 2023 – March 2024

Cecilia Buffon (Chair)	Independent Board Member
Ian Girling	Chief Executive, Dorset Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Jim Andrews	Chief Operating Officer, Bournemouth University
Luke Rake	Principal and Chief Executive, Kingston Maurward College
Nick Gaines	Independent Board Member
Nicola Newman	Independent Board Member, Chair of Dorset Skills Board
Paul Gough	Vice-Chancellor, Arts University Bournemouth
Paul Read	Director of Sustainability and Investment, Magna Housing Ltd
Spencer Flower	Leader, Dorset Council
Simon Gibson (appointed 23 June 2023)	Councillor, Dorset Council
Vikki Slade (appointed 1 June 2023)	Leader, BCP Council
Millie Earl (appointed 27 July 2023)	Deputy Leader, BCP Council
Aaron Lawes (appointed 27 July 2023)	Partner, PKF Francis Clark
Neil Skelland (appointed 27 July 2023)	Director of Business Development, Atlas Elektronik
Phil Sayles (appointed 23 November 2023)	Principal and CEO, Bournemouth & Poole College
Julia Howe (resigned 22 November 2023)	
Drew Mellor (resigned 1 June 2023)	
Sophia Story (resigned 11 April 2023)	
May Palmer (resigned 5 May 2023)	
Cllr. Tony Ferrari (resigned 4 May 2023)	

We were saddened to learn of the death of Councillor Tony Ferrari in November 2023. Cllr Ferrari was a valued and respected member of the DLEP Board for three years while he served as portfolio holder for economic growth, assets and property on Dorset Council's Cabinet.



# OUR FINANCES

We publish our financial statements **online**, in accordance with our Local Assurance Framework.

# OUR TEAM

We would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to all those who worked for, and with, the Dorset LEP team in the last year. To find out more about our team visit our **website**.

# DELIVERY PLAN 2024/2025

We publish our annual business delivery plan **online**, in accordance with our Local Assurance Framework.

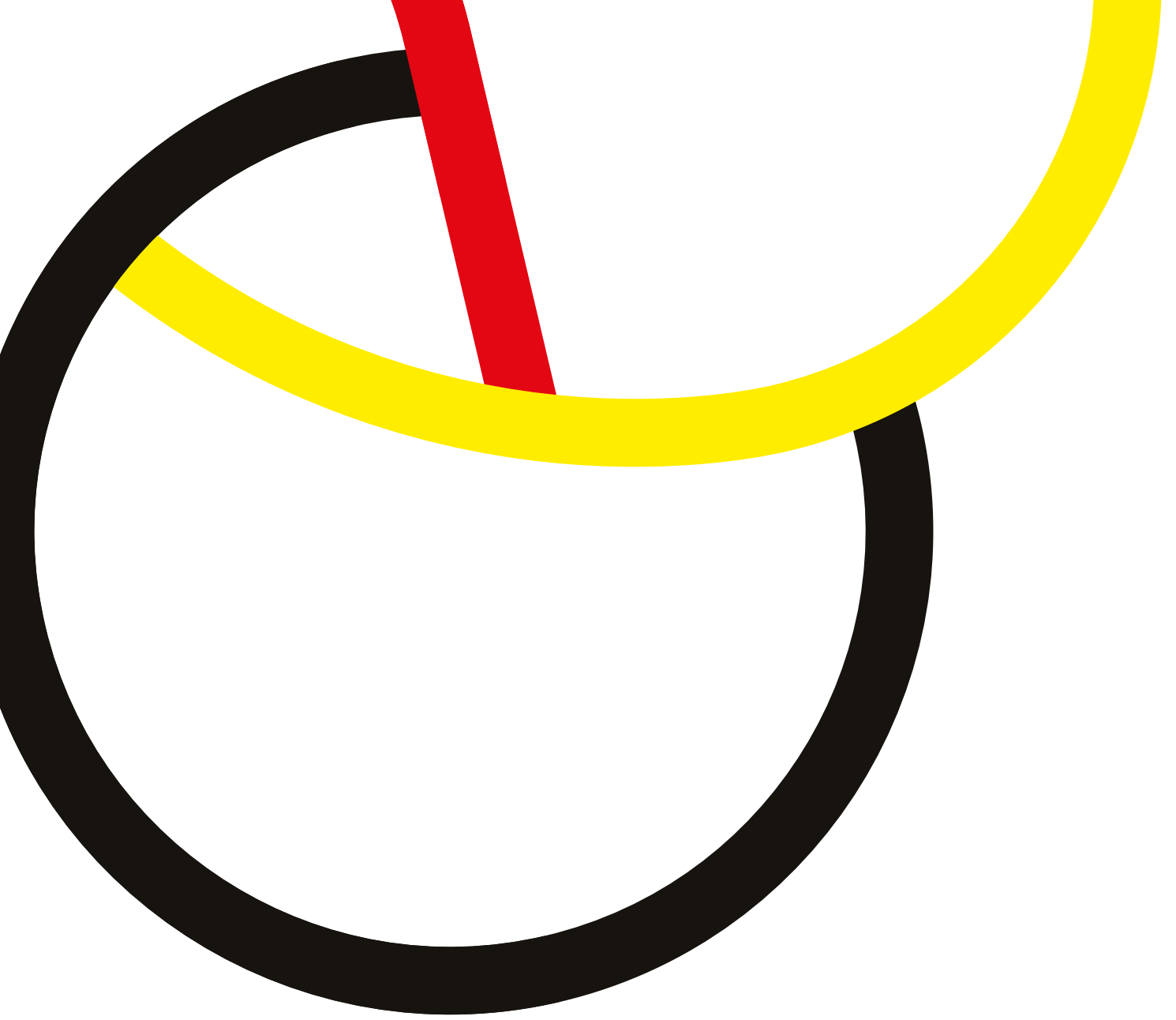
# GOING FORWARD

**At Dorset LEP our mission has been to convene business, education and local government leaders, in a strong local partnership, to bring their different perspectives to a common task of securing economic prosperity for our area.**

Following the Treasury decision to stop funding LEPs directly, guidance published in August 2023 promoted local solution-finding for how the core LEP functions would be integrated into local democratic structures. As a hastening of the 2021 Levelling Up White Paper policy, responsibility for LEP functions transferred to upper tier authorities (where there was not yet a devolution pathway in place) from April 2024. The Guidance made clear that LEPs can continue as private companies either until a devolution deal is agreed for their area or in perpetuity, and Local Authorities can use their LEP as a vehicle for delivering the functions if they wish.

In our area, with local elections in May 23 and May 24, and a General Election expected in 2024, it was agreed that the LEP would continue delivering its functions for the financial year 2024/25. The intention was to take time to understand any changing policy context so that a sustainable future for embedding a business voice in democratic decision making and for strategic economic planning could be co-designed. All three elections are now complete and have changed the local and national political landscape considerably.

The LEP board have formed a task and finish group which includes elected members from both councils to help determine how functions will be delivered from April 2025.



If you would like more information about Dorset LEP, the work that we do, the support we provide, and how we are structured, please visit our website

**[dorsetlep.co.uk](http://dorsetlep.co.uk)**

**[dorsetlep@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:dorsetlep@bournemouth.ac.uk)**

