

**BUSINESS
MANIFESTO**
2025-2026



Herefordshire
& Worcestershire
Chamber of Commerce

PATRON

MEMBERS



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Sharon Smith
Chief Executive

Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the 2025/26 Business Manifesto for Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce. 300 business completed the Quarterly Economic Survey in November 2024, and following numerous business engagements during the year, we have identified six key areas of business activity our members would like us to focus on in the coming year.

In an era of rapid change and global uncertainty, businesses require a clear vision and a strong voice to navigate challenges and seize new opportunities.

This manifesto sets out the support from the Chamber that will drive economic growth, empower businesses, and create a resilient, inclusive, and innovative marketplace across Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

At the heart of our vision are the critical issues shaping the business environment today. Rising operational costs threaten competitiveness, requiring strong policies and support systems to ease financial strain on businesses of all sizes. People remain the backbone of every organisation, and investing in workforce development, talent retention, and well-being is key to long-term prosperity.

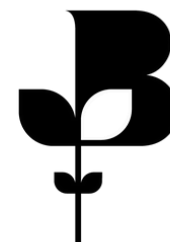
We champion inclusivity and diversity, recognising that equal workplaces drive innovation, engagement, and performance. Businesses must embrace cyber security and technology, safeguarding operations whilst exploiting digital advancements for efficiency and growth.

International trade remains a key factor for business growth requiring policies that facilitate market access, streamline regulations, and encourage global partnerships. At the same time, revenue growth and profitability are essential for businesses to thrive, leading to job creation and investment in innovation.

Sustainability is no longer a choice—it is a necessity. Companies must balance profitability with environmental responsibility, adopting sustainable practices that ensure long-term success while contributing to a healthier planet.

This manifesto serves as a roadmap for business leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders, ensuring that the right conditions exist for businesses to prosper. Together, we can build a dynamic and future-ready economy that benefits all.

I would like to thank every organisation that has contributed to this manifesto and look forward, along with the Chamber team, to be delivering the pledges within.



Chris Walklett
President

Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce

The Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce is excited to present this manifesto, a strategic framework designed to support and advocate for businesses throughout our region. In a time marked by rapid technological advancements, shifting global markets, and increasing financial challenges, it is essential that businesses have the right environment to succeed. This document outlines the key priorities that will guide our efforts to drive regional prosperity, ensuring our local economy remains resilient, competitive, and future-focused.

Businesses are currently grappling with rising costs, from escalating energy prices to supply chain disruptions and inflation. Effectively managing these challenges while striving for profitability and growth is crucial for maintaining a strong local economy. Our Chamber is dedicated to advocating for policies that alleviate these pressures, enabling businesses to reinvest, innovate, and expand.

International trade plays a pivotal role in economic growth. Whether a business is an experienced exporter or just beginning to explore global markets, we recognize the advantages of extending reach beyond national borders. A connected, global business community strengthens our local economy and uncovers new avenues for growth.

Sustainability must be a cornerstone of modern business strategy. As environmental regulations tighten and consumer expectations evolve, businesses must adopt more sustainable practices. The Chamber is committed to supporting companies through their transition to greener operations, helping them reduce costs, enhance their brand, and safeguard long-term success.

This manifesto reaffirms our dedication to helping local businesses navigate challenges and seize new opportunities. By collaborating, we can build a vibrant and prosperous future for Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

At the core of every thriving business are the people who make it work. Attracting, retaining, and developing talent is crucial to ensuring a resilient economy. We support initiatives that address skills shortages, foster workforce development, and create inclusive workplaces where both individuals and businesses can thrive.

Cybersecurity and technology are no longer optional—they are critical to business success. As our region strives to become a leader in digital innovation, it's essential to equip businesses with the tools and expertise to stay competitive. From safeguarding data to adopting AI and automation, we must support businesses in leveraging technology securely and efficiently.



ABOUT US



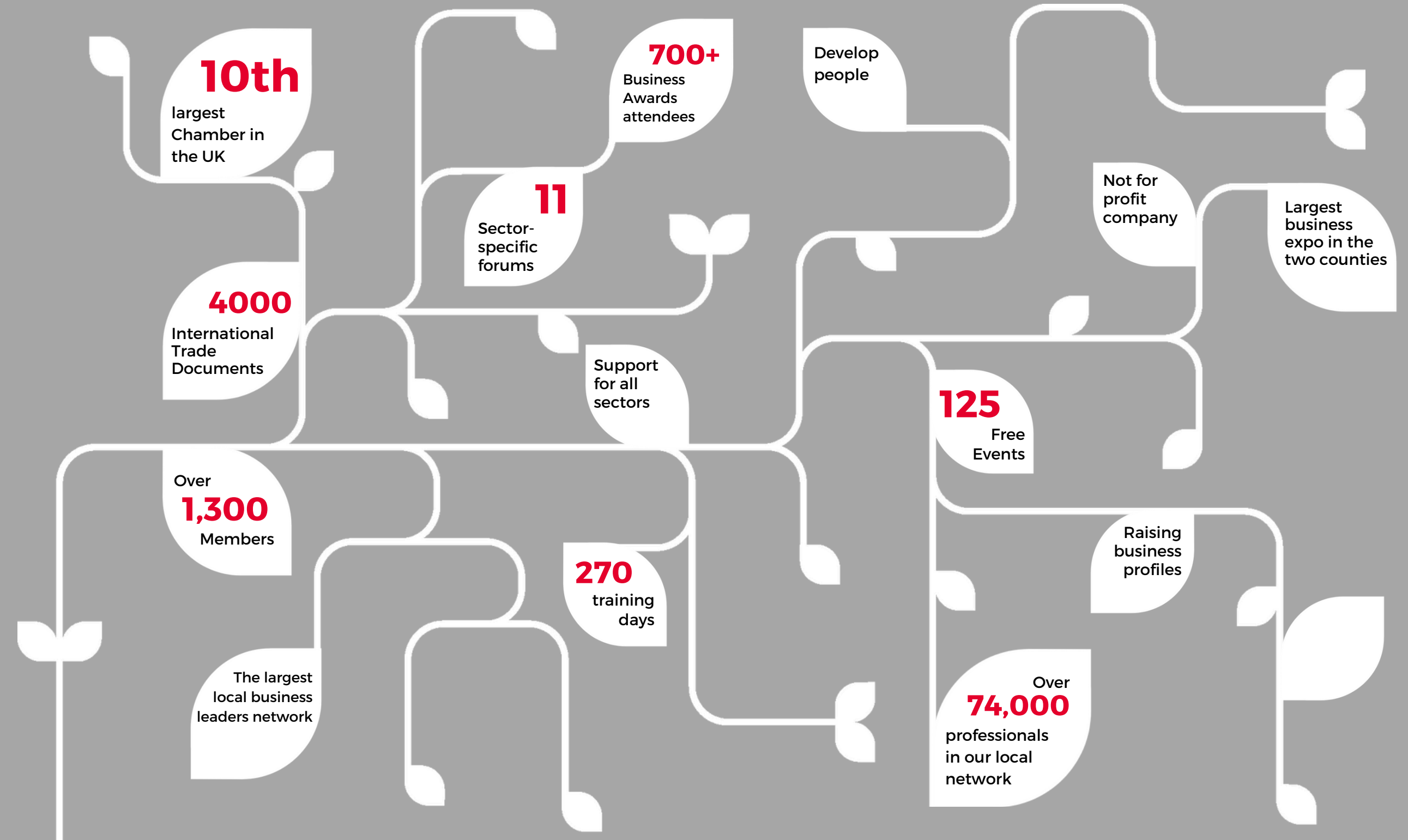
Our Vision:

"Working with the whole business community, to build sustainable economic growth in Herefordshire and Worcestershire".

Our Mission:

"To provide access to solutions that local businesses need in order to achieve their goals, through engaging, influencing and connecting. To be responsive to the external environment, offering responsive and relevant approaches."

Our Values:



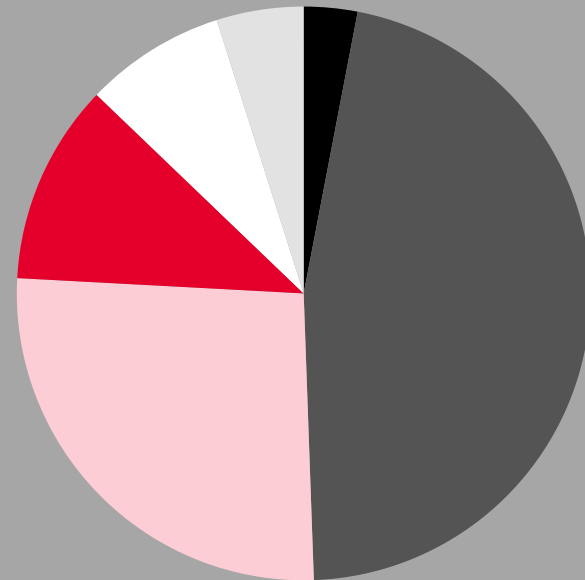
2025-2026 BUSINESS PRIORITIES



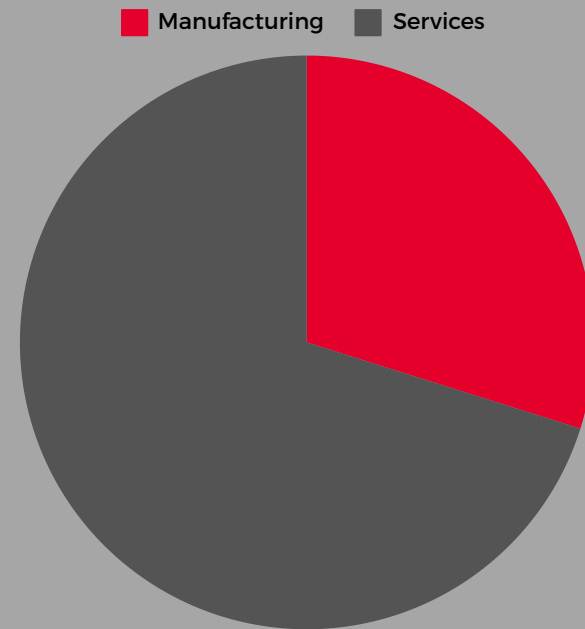
Throughout the year our Policy team, through the Quarterly Economic Survey, collects data from local businesses. More than 300 individual businesses have identified the most important challenges to their organisations. These are illustrated on the next page.

Sole Trader
 1-10
 11-49
 50-100

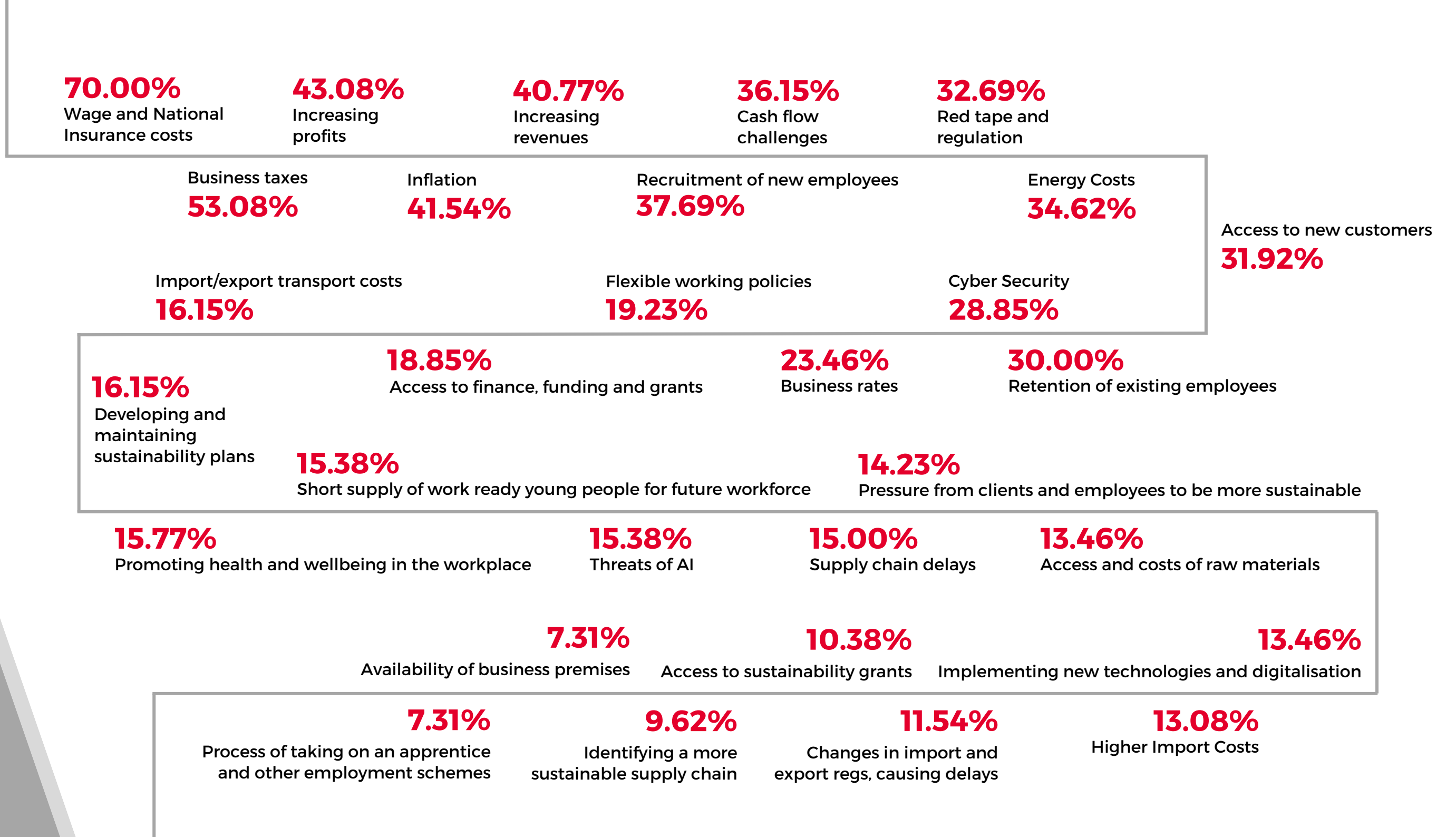
 101-249
 250+



Responses by size



Responses by sector



BUSINESS COSTS

Business costs play a crucial role in determining a company's overall performance and profitability. High operating costs can place a strain on financial resources, restrict growth opportunities, and limit the capacity to invest in innovation or expansion. In contrast, effective cost management enables businesses to allocate funds towards strategic initiatives, enhance profit margins, and maintain competitiveness in the market. Variations in costs, including those related to raw materials, labour, and overheads, can also influence pricing strategies and customer demand. Therefore, diligent monitoring and control of business costs are vital for ensuring long-term sustainability and success.

Understanding cost challenges and their fluctuations throughout the business year is crucial. The Quarterly Economic Survey (QES) helps monitor these changes. We will continue to prioritise this valuable resource and ensure its results are published and accessible to our Members.

The Quarterly Economic Surveys (QES) conducted throughout 2024 highlighted variations in business cost challenges. In the first quarter, 29% of businesses identified corporate taxation as a concern. By November 2024, this figure had risen significantly to 58%, largely due to changes in national insurance following the implementation of a new government policy. Similarly, in Q1, 17% of businesses expressed concern about interest rates, with this figure gradually increasing to 22% by Q4. In Q1, 39% of businesses cited inflation as a concern, and this percentage remained steady throughout 2024. Likewise, the proportion of businesses concerned about business rates remained consistently around 19% throughout the year.

Your challenges:

Our Q4 Quarterly Economic Survey showed that 70% of businesses are reporting wage and national insurance costs as a factor for concern in 2025/26. In the same survey, 53.08% businesses expressed Business Taxes as another challenge for 2025/26. Energy costs and import costs continue to present themselves as challenges for Herefordshire and Worcestershire businesses.

“Current corporation tax rates, current business rates, new employer's NI rates and proposed changes to employee rates effectively increasing the employment cost for the business. Lack of action in the Middle East & Ukraine causing shipping costs and other material and energy costs to remain higher than they should be.” - **Manufacture of Electronic or IT Goods**

WHAT THE CHAMBER WILL DELIVER IN 2025/2026:

- Collaborate closely with public sector authorities to ensure that all grant opportunities are made accessible to our members. These opportunities will be prominently featured on our website through the Cost Hub.
- Actively solicit feedback from members regarding emerging cost pressures they may be facing.
- Continue to highlight best practices demonstrated by member businesses to assess whether the adoption of such practices can assist in reducing costs.
- Maintain ongoing communication with members by providing guidance on policy changes and sector trends through press releases and the Quarterly Economic Survey (QES) reports.
- Continue to organise events and webinars, including our 11 sector-specific forums.
- Promote the 2025 Salary and Benefits Report as a valuable tool for accurately assessing wage pressures and optimizing staff recruitment and retention strategies.
- Maintain regular updates to the Sustainability Hub on the Chamber website, providing businesses with information on cost-saving opportunities, relevant events, projects, and funding options.
- Collaborate with our partners, public sector authorities and the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), to deliver essential information and support to businesses.

Our Policy Commitment:

Through the national Chamber network and the British Chambers of Commerce, we will continue to lobby government to ensure businesses are supported with cost increases, and any support in the form of funding, training, events etc are highlighted via the various forms of Chamber comms.

“ Case Study

In our role as insurance brokers we discuss our clients' financial history and expectations, therefore we get a good feel for how the economy is impacting businesses and the general state of the nation. The reoccurring themes we have heard in the last few years are: everything costs more, we have to work harder for the same result and things are unpredictable. With these sentiments you might think local business owners are pessimistic, but this is not the case, there is a general feeling of optimism, accepting that these hurdles are an inconvenience that will be overcome.

Regarding the insurance market specifically, the last few years have seen a hard market with significant premium increases combined with insurers dictating harsh conditions on policy holders. Thankfully the market is stabilising, with insurers now more willing to compromise on price and conditions, although we are unlikely to see conditions as they were pre-covid.

Looking ahead and predicting the future would make insurance brokers redundant but we can be fairly certain that the climate, pandemics, politicians, the economy, technology and society will continue to throw challenges at businesses. We also know that business owners can take steps to prepare for and respond to these challenges with regularly updated risk management, training and awareness, and appropriate insurance.

DUNCAN SUTCLIFFE - SUTCLIFFE & CO INSURANCE BROKERS



PROFIT & REVENUE

Changes in profit and revenue are key indicators of a business's financial health and performance. An increase in revenue typically signifies that a company is successfully attracting more customers or selling more products, which can lead to higher profits. However, profit margins are also influenced by factors like operating costs, pricing strategies, and efficiency.

“ Case Study

Growing a business at any time is a continual challenge, but in turbulent times those challenges amplify considerably. We've experienced several years where uncertainty has become the norm and there looks like there's no letting up of this trend. So how can a business protect itself against external challenges? I've been around enough to live through several recessions and market fluctuations, you start to see a pattern and find ways to build that protection. Involve your team, be as open and transparent as you can, if there's a problem share it with your employees, be open to feedback and ideas to help solve the problems your business faces. Being a leader is a lonely place, you don't need to face everything on your own, you'll be surprised at some of the solutions your team will come up with and how it will have a positive effect on morale. Increase sales and marketing activity, this sounds obvious, however, I see many organisations cut marketing budgets when times are hard, somehow you must do the opposite, including looking for new markets. Cutting marketing will have a detrimental effect on the longer-term recovery. You have to be open to change and look for new opportunities, new products or services. In some cases, destroying a service to create a new one. Research is key to understanding market needs, talk to customers for their advice. Finally, and importantly, look after your own wellbeing, an exhausted leader is no use to anyone. Take breaks and give yourself time to think and innovate.

DALE PARMENTER - DRPG

Your challenges:

The Quarterly Economic Survey tracks business confidence regarding turnover and profitability. Throughout 2024, turnover projections gradually declined, with 57% of businesses expecting growth in Q1, dropping to 52% in Q2, and finishing the year at 44%. Profitability projections followed a similar trend, with 49% of businesses anticipating improvement in Q1, which decreased to 37% by Q4. In Q1, 18% of businesses predicted a decline in profitability for the following quarter, and by Q4, this figure had risen to 29%.

“When sales are static, every additional cost hits the profit margin of our business. NI, Minimum Wage and increase in rates will mean we either need to find ways to sell more or we will need to increase prices.” - **Retail Business**

Our Policy Commitment:
Through the national Chamber network and the British Chambers of Commerce, we will commit to lobby and work with the government and the Bank of England to implement greater financial investment, business support and ultimately plans for business growth.



WHAT THE CHAMBER WILL DELIVER IN 2025/2026:

- Organise a range of industry-focused, county-specific, and regular networking events, along with informative webinars for Members, to enhance the visibility of organisations both locally and nationally.
- Host the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce Expo in October 2025, providing businesses with the opportunity to showcase their brand, boost sales by purchasing exhibition stands, and engage with industry experts on relevant, current topics.
- Leverage Chamber communications, e-shots, the Policy Newsletter, and Business Direction magazine to showcase projects that could benefit all members, including training initiatives and funding opportunities.
- Relaunch the Growth Forum, designed for businesses of all sizes to learn best practices, overcome challenges, and build relationships that will provide a platform for short- and medium-term growth, while ensuring long-term sustainability.
- Conduct the Quarterly Economic Survey, producing a report for each survey that highlights business confidence and key concerns for that quarter.
- Continue exploring and directing businesses to local and national government funding schemes via the Cost-hub on the Chamber website, featuring details on funding, grants, and business support resources.
- Facilitate regular Bank of England briefings with updates on the national economy, featuring insights from various businesses.

“ Case Study

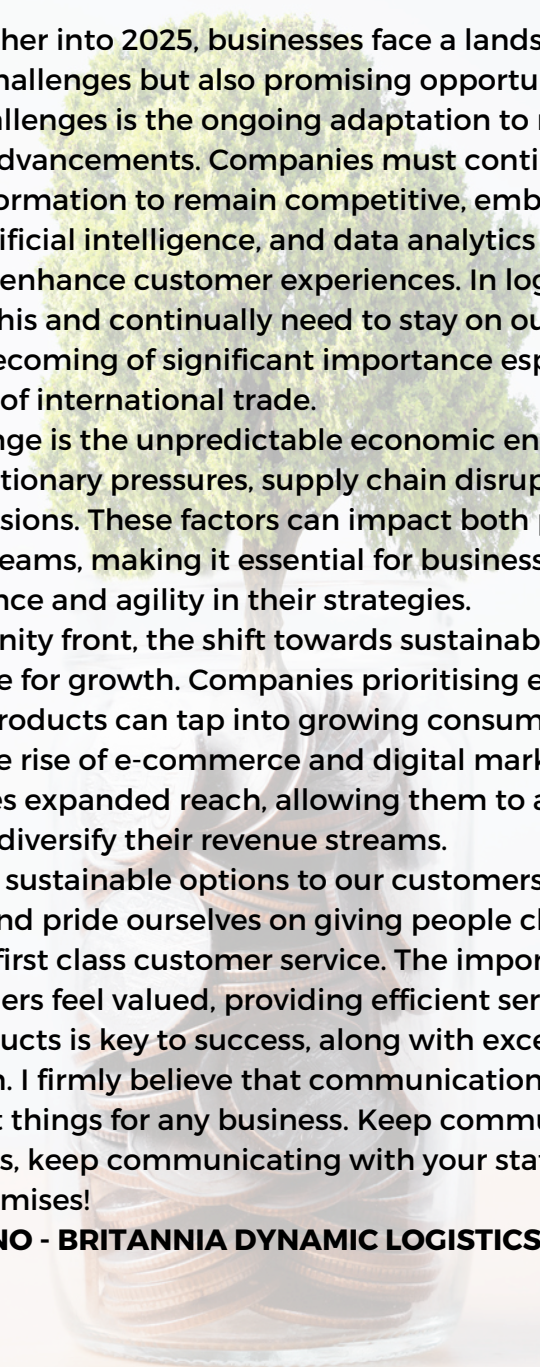
As we head further into 2025, businesses face a landscape shaped by significant challenges but also promising opportunities. One of the primary challenges is the ongoing adaptation to rapid technological advancements. Companies must continually invest in digital transformation to remain competitive, embracing automation, artificial intelligence, and data analytics to optimise operations and enhance customer experiences. In logistics we are no stranger to this and continually need to stay on our toes with digitalisation becoming of significant importance especially within the area of international trade.

Another challenge is the unpredictable economic environment, marked by inflationary pressures, supply chain disruptions, and geopolitical tensions. These factors can impact both profitability and revenue streams, making it essential for businesses to cultivate resilience and agility in their strategies.

On the opportunity front, the shift towards sustainability presents a unique avenue for growth. Companies prioritising eco-friendly practices and products can tap into growing consumer demand. Additionally, the rise of e-commerce and digital marketplaces offers businesses expanded reach, allowing them to access new customers and diversify their revenue streams.

At BDL we offer sustainable options to our customers should they require them, and pride ourselves on giving people choices along with providing first class customer service. The importance of making customers feel valued, providing efficient service or innovative products is key to success, along with exceptional communication. I firmly believe that communication is one of the most important things for any business. Keep communicating with your clients, keep communicating with your staff, and always deliver your promises!

PHIL SCHIAFFINO - BRITANNIA DYNAMIC LOGISTICS



PEOPLE, INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSITY

People, inclusivity, and diversity are vital to a business's long-term success. A diverse workforce fosters creativity, innovation, and problem-solving, while businesses that prioritise inclusivity see higher employee engagement, productivity, and satisfaction. When employees feel valued, they contribute their best work, benefiting the company's performance.

Moreover, promoting diversity enhances a company's ability to connect with a broad range of customers. Companies that reflect the diversity of their communities can better meet consumer needs, leading to stronger relationships, improved brand loyalty, and expanded market opportunities. Committing to inclusivity also attracts top talent and strengthens the company's reputation and competitiveness.

Our Policy Commitment:

As a Chamber, we will keep advancing the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), while advocating for local apprenticeship opportunities, work-based experiences, and ensuring businesses have ample chances to collaborate with local universities, schools, and colleges.

Your challenges:

The number of businesses attempting to recruit gradually declined throughout 2024, with 52% in Q1 compared to 46% in Q4. Notably, by the end of 2024, the top business priority identified was Wage and National Insurance Costs, which accounted for 70%. Starting in April 2025, the UK government's planned increase in employers' National Insurance contributions—from 13.8% to 15%—and the reduction of the earnings threshold from £9,100 to £5,000 will significantly raise employment costs for businesses. This financial burden may prompt companies to scale back recruitment efforts, freeze hiring, or even reduce existing positions, potentially affecting job opportunities and hindering economic growth.

“Like all organisations, particularly charities, the NI increases on top of the NMW have created significant challenges and will likely lead to higher prices for customers.” - **Hospitality Business**

“NI increase means very real decisions about hiring new people and growth plans by investment.” - **Professional Services Business**

“ Case Study

To find new people who have a solid grounding, workplace and other specific skills, employers should be aware of the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC). Becoming a signatory could provide opportunity to embrace the armed forces, attract military talent and solve some people shortages. The AFC is a promise, ensuring that those who serve, or have served, and their families, are treated fairly. Its key principles are that the Armed Forces (AF) community should be treated fairly in the provision of public and commercial services; and that special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given the most, such as the injured and the bereaved. By becoming signatories to the AFC, organisations choose to sign a voluntary pledge in order to demonstrate their support for the AF community and for the principles of the Covenant. All organisations – public, private or voluntary, small, medium or large – are welcome to sign the Covenant. In doing so you will join over 12,600 across the nation, and some 1,500 regionally. Displaying the AFC logo, and registering as an employer on the free to access Defence sponsored recruitment platforms, serves to bring your organisation to the attention of the community.

Philip Sinclair - Ministry of Defence

WHAT THE CHAMBER WILL DELIVER IN 2025/2026:

- Ensure that the Skills Hub remains up-to-date and easily accessible on the Chamber website.
- Enhance the Chamber's training offerings to support members in developing their workforce, providing tailored and specialised training to address specific business needs.
- Continue to advocate for equality and diversity in the workplace through case studies, forums, and training initiatives, making a positive impact on both society and local communities.
- Build on the successful partnerships established in 2024 with universities, further education institutions, and training providers to collaborate on localised support programs.
- Maintain the delivery of Young Professional events to assist emerging professionals in honing their networking skills, while also offering ongoing forums and opportunities for HR professionals to exchange best practices and broaden their expertise.
- Further the advancement of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) by collaborating with employers and training providers to identify the skills needs of local businesses and strengthen the relationship between these two groups.
- Continue to partner with public sector authorities and further education providers to assess the skills needs of businesses in the region and ensure that employees have access to relevant training opportunities.

“ Case Study

UK businesses have been presented with a unique set of challenges in the year ahead, particularly concerning developments in the labour market. The upcoming changes in Employer National Insurance are set to have a significant impact on cost structures across every sector. This adjustment calls for organisations to strategically rethink their staffing models and approach to workforce planning to maintain competitiveness without compromising on talent quality.

Equally impactful is the rise in the National Living Wage. Whilst this has the economic benefit of enhancing workers' purchasing power and supporting the welfare of our workforce, it again means that businesses need to focus on operational efficiencies to balance higher wage costs. Perhaps most significantly, the integration of Artificial Intelligence in the workplace heralds a paradigm shift in how work is performed and managed. AI's capacity to automate complex tasks is not just a horizon trend but a present reality, affecting everything from administrative functions to customer interactions, software programming and decision-making processes. This technological evolution offers tremendous potential to enhance productivity and innovation but also emphasises the need for a re-evaluation of skills development and workforce planning. As leaders in the business community across Herefordshire & Worcestershire, it is imperative that we embrace these changes with a forward-thinking approach. By investing in continuous learning and development, adapting to more efficient technologies, and redefining roles to complement AI capabilities, we can ensure a resilient and thriving future for our businesses amidst a dynamic and ever-changing economic landscape.

Ben Mannion - Hewett Recruitment



CYBER SECURITY AND TECHNOLOGY

Cybersecurity is increasingly critical for businesses as the frequency and sophistication of cyberattacks continue to rise. With growing reliance on digital platforms for communication, transactions, and data storage, organisations must protect sensitive information from breaches that can cause financial loss, legal consequences, and reputational damage. A strong cybersecurity framework helps safeguard not only company data but also customer trust, which is vital in maintaining a competitive edge. By implementing robust security measures, businesses can prevent disruptions and ensure continuity in their operations, providing a secure environment for both employees and customers.

Embracing new technologies is equally important for businesses looking to stay ahead in an ever-evolving marketplace. Innovation can improve efficiency, streamline processes, and open up new opportunities for growth. From artificial intelligence and automation to cloud computing and data analytics, adopting the right technologies allows businesses to optimise their operations, enhance customer experiences, and make data-driven decisions. Keeping up with technological advancements enables companies to remain competitive, adapt to changing market demands, and unlock new revenue streams, ultimately positioning them for long-term success.

Your challenges:

In the fourth quarter of 2024, 28.85% of businesses reported cyber security as a pressing challenge or concern, reflecting the growing vulnerability to cyber threats and the increasing importance of robust digital security measures. This highlights the need for businesses to strengthen their defenses against cyber-attacks, data breaches, and other forms of digital disruption. In addition, 15.38% of businesses expressed concerns regarding the potential risks posed by artificial intelligence (AI).

“Increase in NI for businesses will make us less likely to try to recruit. More likely to turn to efficiency savings and productivities, as well as looking more into AI.” - **Marketing and Communications Business**

WHAT THE CHAMBER WILL DELIVER IN 2025/2026:

- Collaborate with members of the technology sector to demonstrate the benefits of technological advancements to the broader Chamber membership.
- Emphasise the risks associated with cyber security and offer practical solutions to mitigate these threats.
- Maintain and expand training courses to enable employees to sustain their competencies while developing new skills.
- Continue working with affiliate partner, Cyber Essentials, to help promote the scheme and offer Members a discount on the certification.
- Continue collaborating with local universities, including the University of Worcester and NMiTE, as well as Higher Education establishments and Training providers to ensure that educational programs align with industry requirements and emerging developments.
- Promote and emphasise Technology and Innovation funding opportunities through the Chamber's Cost Hub.

Our Policy Commitment:

To continue to lobby government to provide funding and incentives to encourage innovation for businesses that want to introduce new technologies to enable business growth.

To continue to highlight the risks of Cyber security and provide information to businesses to protect them from Cyber-crime.



“ Case Study

Our appetite for news has never been greater – but these days we are spoiled for choice. Whether you access your news via an app, a website, a newsletter emailed straight to your inbox, a digital subscription, social media page or in good old-fashioned print, everyone has easy access to the latest headlines. The majority of readers may have long made the switch from print to digital but be careful about writing print off just yet. In Worcestershire we have seen print sales level off over the past 12 months with some of our weekly print titles growing sales from year to year. That said the demand for 24-hour news coverage has seen a boom in digital audience growth and local news websites such as the Worcester News are leading that trend. At LOCALiQ, we've seen firsthand how data-driven digital marketing strategies help businesses thrive in this changing landscape. In 2024, social media algorithms prioritised authentic, engaging content, making it crucial for brands to refine their storytelling. The surge in AI-generated content offers efficiency, but businesses must balance automation with human creativity to maintain trust and originality. Looking ahead to 2025/26, AI will enable hyper-targeted advertising, leveraging first-party data as privacy regulations tighten. Businesses should invest in AI-powered analytics to understand audience behaviour, optimise content strategies for emerging platforms, and embrace immersive technologies to enhance customer engagement. Adapting to these changes isn't just about technology—it's about understanding audience needs and staying agile in a dynamic media landscape. LOCALiQ (through its suite of digital marketing solutions, including AI-driven programmatic advertising, SEO, and paid social strategies) is here to support businesses with marketing solutions that will ensure they remain competitive and drive deeper customer connections in the years ahead.

Dale Godliman - LOCALiQ

“ Case Study

Cyber Security must remain a key boardroom priority for all businesses as we look ahead into 2025 / 26, as the threat landscape is evolving at such a rapid pace, as new technologies are introduced every day. The fact that hacking tools are readily available for purchase on the Internet is testimony to the fact that the risks will only increase year on year.

Defending your business, company data and employees from cyber attacks is not a one-time activity, as threat actors strive to be constantly two steps ahead. The utilisation of AI is not only increasing the volume of attacks, but it is making it easier to be more targeted, thus making it harder to defend. AI is now also facilitating the ability to merge text, images, voice and data which allows threats actors to leverage and automate multi-faceted attacks that impersonate friends, family and supply chain operatives, in what would appear a normalised event. They are designed to earn the trust of individuals or organisations, to perform what they believe is a legitimate transaction.

As a security business, EBC Group would recommend that Cyber Security should be on every boardroom risk agenda. As a minimum, businesses need to adopt a Zero Trust methodology as a default position, with every request authenticated and authorised before transaction. Educating employees on a regular basis on the latest cyber threats, phishing tactics and essential guidance on how to perform secure practices is a must. Unfortunately, employees still remaining the weakest link.

Making sure your network is secure, patched with the latest software releases and continuously monitored 24x7x365 is the standard everyone should adopt. And in the event that something did happen, having a fully tested incident and continuity plan to execute, will make significant difference, as time will be of the essence.

In summary, businesses in 2025 and 2026 should expect more sophisticated and diverse cybersecurity threats. Ensuring you have a proactive approach and a multi-layered defense strategy will be crucial to mitigating these risks and keeping your business in business.

Mike Cook - ebc Group

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is increasingly important for businesses as it addresses both environmental and social responsibilities, ensuring long-term success without compromising future generations' ability to thrive. Prioritising sustainability helps businesses reduce their environmental impact, conserve resources, and minimise waste, all of which are crucial for combating climate change and preserving natural ecosystems. Moreover, as consumers and investors become more environmentally conscious, companies that embrace sustainable practices are seen as more trustworthy and forward-thinking, which can lead to enhanced brand reputation and customer loyalty. Adopting sustainable practices also opens up opportunities for innovation, cost savings, and regulatory compliance, making it not only a moral obligation but a smart business strategy for securing a competitive edge in a rapidly evolving marketplace.

Support can also be found on the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce Sustainability Hub on the Chamber website and the Net Zero Hub on the British Chambers of Commerce website.

Your challenges:

In Q4 2024 34.62% of businesses expressed energy costs as a current challenge or concern. 16.15% said that developing and maintaining sustainability plans was also a concern for 2025.

“Lack of support for people wishing to invest in sustainable forms of heating other than heat pumps or solar panels.” - **Engineering Business**

Our Policy Commitment:

Lobby government to ensure advice and funding are provided to businesses to increase every opportunity for them to become more sustainable.

Ensure support in the form of funding, grants, events, and networking are promoted to businesses to reduce the impact of rising inflation and energy costs.



WHAT THE CHAMBER WILL DELIVER IN 2025/2026:

- Organise four sustainability forums throughout 2025/26, featuring companies and industry experts to address the challenges of climate change and explore ways in which organisations can become more sustainable and environmentally responsible.
- Continue to track and disseminate grant and funding opportunities available to businesses across the two counties.
- Assess and advance our own Net Zero Action Plan, aiming for a 5% reduction in our KWH consumption.
- Promote additional case studies of best practices to provide businesses with actionable steps they can take to contribute to sustainability efforts.
- Enhance the sustainability hub on the Chamber's website by collaborating with partners, including local growth hubs, to provide the business community with up-to-date information and resources.
- Recognising and highlighting the remarkable achievements of those excelling in this area through the Chamber Business Awards.

“ Case Study

EVG Group have been making major investments into sustainable energy solutions and renewable energies for more than a decade. Ensuring the most sustainable environmental practice is at the heart of our business. We manage our land in a manner which protects and enhances the environment and biodiversity. This includes replantation of native trees and hedgerows, managing soil health through crop rotations, supporting pollinators through wildflower and grass planting in field borders, and using an integrated pest management approach to production that combines different strategies to grow healthy crops whilst minimising pesticide use. Our energy business, Vale Green Energy, consists of a solar farm that generates over 19,000 MW of renewable energy – this is enough to power 5,800 homes a year, saving over 8,300 tonnes of CO2 being released to the atmosphere! Our AD plants produce over 10 million cubic meters of green gas, from plant-based sources, and 13,000 tonnes of food, beverage, and medical grade CO2 are captured as part of the process. An additional 6 million cubic meters of green gas is injected through the virtual pipeline for industrial and domestic use. Our unique energy model involves self-produced renewable energy that our La Serra glasshouse requires to produce tomatoes, ensuring that we provide low-carbon and sustainable, British tomatoes to all our customers. Our overall vision is to be Industry Leading in Sustainability, and we have identified 5 key areas where we will focus our attentions:

1. Emissions – reduce greenhouse gas emissions to Net Zero in our own operations by 2040.
2. Water – minimise the use of water.
3. Food Waste – reduce food waste.
4. Plastics – collaborate with customers to reduce packaging.
5. Biodiversity – net positive for biodiversity.

Opportunity drivers in this space involve increased use of renewable energy, increased water resource efficiency in our direct operations and supply chain, precision farming, and developing varieties that have increased virus and climate resistance.

Some of the challenges we may face in the upcoming years include:

- Changes to national legislation affecting our operations
- Increased difficulty with attracting and retaining staff through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme
- Limited UK specialist partners to deliver cutting-edge projects
- Acute physical risks like drought and flood affecting the quality of crop produced
- Changes to the planning system that affect our progress with delivering cutting-edge projects or sustainable food

EVG GROUP

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

International trade is vital for businesses as it expands their market reach, boosts sales, and diversifies revenue streams. By accessing global resources and markets, companies can reduce reliance on local demand, enhance innovation, and stay competitive in a connected economy. It opens opportunities for growth and strengthens long-term success.

Businesses in Herefordshire and Worcestershire engage in global import and export activities. International trade encompasses several key components, including securing sales, arranging delivery, receiving goods, and exploring new markets. Over the past decade, the United Kingdom's position in international trade has evolved due to various factors, including domestic political and economic changes. Since exiting the European Union, the UK has experienced shifts in trade policies, fluctuations in shipping and transportation costs, unexpected customs charges, delays, and other uncertainties. Nevertheless, the UK has established an independent role within the World Trade Organisation and, as a result, has entered into new trade agreements. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine, coupled with other disruptions to global supply chains, has further impacted businesses seeking to engage in international trade. The Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber remains dedicated to collaborating with local, national, and regional governments to ensure that businesses in the two counties are able to trade effectively with both EU and non-EU countries, fostering economic growth and development.

Our Policy Commitment:
Through the Chamber network and the British Chambers of Commerce, we will continue to provide expert advice to businesses on how to navigate the ever-changing world of international trade.

Your challenges:

Domestic political and economic changes have led businesses to report challenges in staying abreast of evolving requirements and regulations. Approximately 32.69% of importers and exporters identified red tape and regulatory compliance as a significant issue impacting their operations. Additionally, 16.15% of businesses reported import and export transportation costs as a concern at the close of 2024.

“Increasing costs to businesses, in an already difficult trading environment.” -
Manufacturing Business

WHAT THE CHAMBER WILL DELIVER IN 2025/2026:

- The Chamber's International Trade and Membership teams will persist in providing comprehensive international business support and guidance, whilst maintaining a global network through the International Chamber of Commerce and 120 Embassies and High Commissions worldwide. We will also collaborate closely with the British Chambers of Commerce to support the implementation of their Trade Strategy Manifesto.
- The Chamber will continue to host the International Trade Forum, fostering the exchange of knowledge, best practices, and key insights between both Members and Non-members.
- Maintain our provision of Export Documentation services, as well as Import and Export Customs Declaration services through Chamber Customs.
- Remain committed to expanding and enhancing its international trade training courses, offering businesses the opportunity to upskill on a wide array of relevant topics for both new and experienced exporters, as well as small and large corporations across diverse sectors.
- We will broaden our temporary status export offerings, including ATA Carnet and declaration services, enhancing our expertise and ensuring compliance in an increasingly dynamic market.
- Furthermore, the Chamber will regularly share updates on new contracts, examples of best practices, and emerging trade initiatives through consistent communications.

“ Case Study

The international marketplace represents potential gold in the ground for UK businesses. Success does not come easy and requires strategic planning and execution. So what do you prioritise? What might the international entrepreneur need to revisit?

1. Market Research

At the risk of stating the obvious: research, research, research. Identify markets with the most demand for your products or services. Assess cultural, economic, and legal factors that could influence your decision. Top tip: do not try and conquer the world in one go. Nail one territory then grow from there.

2. Understand Trade Regulations and Compliance

Tariffs, customs, and import/export regulations. Don't assume the UK framework applies in other countries. Filter your growth plan by also factoring in these aspects – and do not forward tax. Top tip: the UK Trade Tariff tool and Export Support Service can guide businesses on requirements in specific countries.

3. What's the local strategy?

Assuming (and crucially) you have an overall business strategy it is key to adapt your offering to meet local preferences. This includes tailoring marketing, packaging, and even product features. Hiring local representatives or partnering with in-market distributors can help you understand cultural nuances and build trust. Top tip: make sure you have an overall strategy first.

4. Financial Considerations

Expanding internationally requires significant financial investment. Secure adequate funding and establish a strategy to mitigate currency exchange risks. Top tip: consider export financing schemes like UK Export Finance (UKEF) to support cash flow during growth, and reach out to businesses organisations for support.

5. A Digital World

Where possible and relevant optimise your e-commerce platform for international trade, including currency, language, and delivery options. Who will you partner with to ensure efficient shipping and clear customs processes? Top tip: digitalisation drives efficiency – and ensure you have this in mind when you are looking for guidance from the business organisations referred to above. Bishop Fleming can help you make connections with partners, suppliers and support agencies in over 120 countries. If you are looking to grow internationally then make your first step with Bishop Fleming.

CHRIS WALKLETT - BISHOP FLEMING



SUPPORTING BUSINESSES IN HEREFORDSHIRE



“ Testimonials

“I cannot stress enough how much of a key part that grant funding has been to the success and growth of our Hereford manufacturing business. The whole process from start to finish was so well run and organised.” - **Manufacturer in Herefordshire**

“Staying up to date with the latest technology is an important part of what we do at Visicon and as a small business this can sometimes be tricky.... this grant has helped us to add the very latest technology to our demo suite which allows us to help a wider variety of solutions.” - **Automation Company in Herefordshire**

“This funding has been life changing, not only for me, but for all the incredible people that have joined and started to reap the benefits of moving more.” **Health Care Provider in Herefordshire**

“It’s a brilliant addition to our Ultra High Pressure assembly line. A big step forward on our efficiency and digitisation journey. Thanks to the Herefordshire Growth Hub for the support in making this project possible.” - **Thomas Binns, General Manager, CEJN UK**

Herefordshire has over 10,750 Herefordshire businesses, with 99.7% of these being micro businesses and SMEs.

Herefordshire Council's Cabinet has backed a plan to borrow a further £30 million towards the expected £40.3-million cost of phase one of the Hereford bypass plan.

Over the last 3 years, £2.94million of UKSPF funding has been allocated to support Herefordshire businesses with a range of interventions and over £1.2 million to support the local cultural and creative sectors.

Herefordshire Council has worked with partners to form a Skills Board, bringing together all of the colleges and local training providers, to ensure that we can better respond to employers current and future skills needs and help grow the labour force needed for our future.

Herefordshire Council, along with our partners, are also leading on a range of major projects in Hereford including a new £19million Museum and Art Gallery, a new world class Library and Learning Centre in the Shire hall and a new Levelling Up funded, Transport Hub at Hereford Railway Station.

New Herefordshire Business Growth Board has recently been recruited, to provide a forum to engage with the private sector and enable businesses to help shape Council support for business and influence decisions about how government investment is best utilised to support the local economy.

To support this, the Council made over £1.2m available through our UK Shared Prosperity Funding and launched a skills programme offering a range of fully funded and subsidised training opportunities to local individuals and businesses.

Following the end of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, the Herefordshire Growth Hub, delivered by Herefordshire Council's Economic Development Team at, was launched in 2024, to provide support to businesses of all sizes and across all sectors in the county. The team offers free, impartial information and guidance on business grants, loans, support and other opportunities to help any Herefordshire businesses succeed.

Herefordshire Council has worked closely with rural partners from the Herefordshire Rural Hub, National Farmers Union and Country Landowners Association to help allocate £1.7m Rural England Prosperity Fund, to ensure that it was focussed on rural businesses, rural diversification and rural community facilities.

Herefordshire Council has committed £12million of investment to create new employment land in the market towns, including £8m for the first phase of Ross Enterprise Park, which should be in site later in 2025. We are currently exploring opportunities for the remaining £4million in other market towns.

SUPPORTING BUSINESSES IN WORCESTERSHIRE

Vision and Objectives

Worcestershire County Council is driving this through collaboration with the private sector and Local Enterprise Partnership, with a focus on being Open for Business.

Plan for Growth

Worcestershire County Council is building a modern, tech-driven economy that's recovering from the pandemic and attracting investment. Since 2015, Worcestershire has seen £2bn added to the economy, with 34,000 jobs and 17,360 new homes created. Key to this growth is connecting people and places, both physically and digitally, supporting high-tech industries and generating income to reinvest in community priorities. The Council's pro-business approach focuses on advanced manufacturing, agri-tech, ICT, and defence and cybersecurity. By working with local businesses and creating conditions for high-growth sectors, the Council aims to unlock more opportunities. Continued support will be given to the construction, business and professional services and healthcare sectors, along with high-growth start-ups, helping them thrive with tailored guidance and investment.

A Connected County

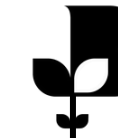
The Council is transforming Worcestershire's connectivity to create a resilient, dynamic future. Ongoing transport and digital infrastructure improvements will connect people and businesses better than ever before. Projects like Worcestershire Parkway Station and road enhancements such as the A440 Southern bypass of Worcester and A38 improvements in Bromsgrove will cut travel times, create jobs, and unlock new opportunities. By 2027, 90% of homes and businesses will have gigabit broadband, alongside advances in mobile telecoms and 5G. This digital transformation will position Worcestershire as a leader in the future economy.

Delivering Strategic Investment Sites

Worcestershire has a strong record of delivering key investment sites like Worcester Six Business Park and Malvern Hills Science Park, adding over 1.4 million square feet of employment space. The Council aims to continue attracting high-skill jobs and providing flexible investment opportunities for businesses of all sizes.

Investing in the Workforce

A high-skilled workforce is essential for future growth. By 2027, Worcestershire County Council aims to increase the number of people with Level 3 qualifications, aligning skills with local business needs. There is a focus on retaining graduates and high-skilled workers by offering more flexible working and improving access to jobs across the country through enhanced infrastructure. Through its partnership with the Worcestershire Careers Hub, the Worcestershire County Council will help young people prepare for the future with apprenticeships and work experience, ensuring they develop the skills needed to succeed in a changing economy.



BRITISH CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE POLICY REPORTS

Our expert business support is concentrated in five core areas: Global Britain, People and Work, Local Economy of the Future, Green Innovation, and Digital Revolution. These areas have been carefully selected based on our unparalleled insight into British and global business communities. Regardless of your sector, size, or location, we strive to address your diverse needs in the modern business landscape. Businesses trust us to be their advocates, and we're passionate about helping them trade and grow.



PEOPLE AND WORK
BOOSTING SKILLS: JOURNEY THROUGH EDUCATION AND WORK
 To grow our economy we need more skilled, engaged and motivated people to contribute to the workforce in every part of the UK. In recent years, however, we have had record levels of job vacancies. Employers have experienced a shortage of job candidates and a mismatch of skills on offer. It's had a damaging impact on firms' ability to fulfil order books, take on new work and operate profitably.

[Read Report Here.](#)



LOCAL ECONOMY OF THE FUTURE
A BUSINESS-LED PLAN FOR THRIVING COMMUNITIES
 Businesses play a pivotal role in shaping the economic landscape of the UK, and their impact extends far beyond the national level. Local economic development is an essential facet of a thriving society, and businesses are integral to its success. Their role is more than simply the generation of profits; it encompasses a commitment to the well-being and growth of the communities in which they operate.

[Read Report Here.](#)



GREEN INNOVATION
BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES FOR UK BUSINESSES
 The UK has the potential to lead the world in green innovation. We have a strong economic base, and a legal and policy framework designed to ensure we reach net zero emissions by 2050. To reach those targets and address our shared environmental challenges, businesses must play a leadership role.

[Read Report Here.](#)



GLOBAL BRITAIN
ACCELERATING GROWTH: DRIVING TRADE AND INWARD INVESTMENT
 How does Global Britain present itself on the international stage? In considering this question we have heard from many about a long-term optimism, but juxtaposed with short-term anxieties. This is a great country. And with it a great belief in our cultural capital, our talent, our institutions and our capacity for innovation.

[Read Report Here.](#)



DIGITAL REVOLUTION
NAVIGATING OUR DIGITAL FUTURE
 The digital revolution opens a wealth of opportunities for UK businesses of all shapes and sizes. This report outlines a clear roadmap for action from policymakers across a series of interconnected areas. Without better broadband and wireless connectivity – and improved cyber security – businesses will not be able to engage with Artificial Intelligence (AI). In short, businesses want to be connected, secure and dynamic.

[Read Report Here.](#)



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Upcoming research and report dates

Q2 2025
 Fieldwork: 12 May to 9 June
 Publication: July 2025

Q3 2025
 Fieldwork: 18 August to 15 September
 Publication: October 2025

Q4 2025
 Fieldwork: 10 November to 8 December
 Publication: January 2026

Salary & Benefits 2026
 Fieldwork: October 2025
 Publication: January 2026

POLICY

CONTACTS