



## ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

Date: Thursday, 12 December 2024

Time: 6.00pm,

Location: Council Chamber - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Contact: Alex Marsh (01438) 242587

committees@stevenage.gov.uk

Members: Councillors: R Broom (Chair), A McGuinness (Vice-Chair), L Brady, F Chowdhury, A Gordon, S Mead, C Parris, E Plater, N Williams, J Woods and J Ashley-Wren

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### AGENDA

#### **PART 1**

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 12 NOVEMBER 2024**

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2024.

3 – 8

**3. SKILLS REVIEW - INPUT FROM STEP 2 SKILLS HCC ADULT LEARNING & TRAINING SERVICE**

The Hertfordshire County Council, Step2Skills service that provides adult community learning and employment support service opportunities for adults in Hertfordshire have been invited to provide input regarding the skills review.

9 – 10

**4. DRAFT REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SKILLS REVIEW**

To consider the draft report and emerging recommendations of the Committees review into skills.

11 – 22

**5. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

To consider any Part 1 business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

**6. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

To consider the following motions –

1. That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

**7. URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

To consider any Part II business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

## STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

### ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 12 November 2024

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber - Daneshill House, Danestrete

**Present:** Councillors: Rob Broom (Chair), Leanne Brady, Forhad Chowdhury, Alistair Gordon, Sarah Mead, Claire Parris, Ellie Plater CC, Graham Snell and Jade Woods

**Start / End Time:** Start Time: 6.00pm  
End Time: 7.30pm

#### 1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andy McGuinness and Nigel Williams.

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 2 **MINUTES - 8 OCTOBER 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Economy Select Committee, held on 8 October 2024, be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### 3 **CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE**

The Chair introduced the Climate Change Update, a biannual review typically taken in November and March of each year and highlighted the Committee's long-standing commitment to monitoring progress in this area due to its critical importance.

The Chair welcomed the guest speakers to the Committee. Matt Partridge (Chief Executive), Simon Speller (Portfolio Holder, Environment and Performance), Zayd al Jawad (Assistant Director, Planning and Regulation) and Fabian Oyarzun (Head of Climate Action).

The Chair opened the discussion with a reflection on the global urgency surrounding climate change. Recent events such as flooding in Central Europe and Spain, and high temperatures across the Mediterranean, were noted as stark reminders of the ongoing crisis. While these events were not directly attributable to local action or inaction, they underscored the importance of the Council's efforts in reducing carbon emissions, enhancing biodiversity, and encouraging behavioural change.

The Cabinet was presented with a report and received a presentation from the Head of Climate Action which provided an overview of the measures the Council was implementing to address climate change. Specifically, the report detailed the most significant climate action efforts undertaken across the themes identified in the 2020 Climate Change Strategy.

The Committee were informed about a Climate Action Framework that considered 9 levels of climate action ranging from a macro global and national levels, through to a micro community, family and individual levels.

The Head of Climate Action advised the Committee of ongoing participation in regional initiatives including the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) and the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership (HWP).

The Committee heard that Stevenage's 2022 emissions had decreased by 17.5% against 2018 levels, while the Council's organisational emissions had dropped by 39%. A switch to hydro-treated vegetable oil (HVO) for fleet fuel was projected to yield further reductions.

The Head of Climate Action informed the Committee that an online portal had been launched, detailing over 50 climate actions and offering citizens opportunities to provide feedback.

Addressing the ongoing efforts of local businesses, the Head of Climate Action advised members that large local companies were actively pursuing net-zero targets, while small and medium-sized businesses were supported through schemes such as the recently launched Stevenage Green Business Grant, the Sustainable Business Programme funded by the UKSPF (UK Shared Prosperity Fund), and the WENTA Zero Action Plan.

The Committee heard that the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund had enabled retrofitting of 446 homes using the last two rounds since 2023, with other ongoing projects supporting improved energy efficiency in social and private housing. While transport initiatives included the Council's fleet decarbonisation, deployment of electric vehicles, and public schemes like a cycle hire programme and enhanced EV charging infrastructure.

Addressing waste and recycling, the Head of Climate Action advised Members that targets included transitioning entirely to energy-from-waste facilities by 2030 and increasing recycling rates from the current 39.1% to 60% by 2035.

The Committee were informed that a Biodiversity Action Plan had been adopted, focusing on habitat conservation and enhancement, with 63 actions identified. The Climate Change Strategy 2020, included linked targets such as increasing Stevenage's tree canopy cover to 19% and planting 4,000 trees by 2030.

The Committee heard that eight community-led initiatives had been funded under the Climate Change Community Fund, addressing waste reduction, biodiversity, water conservation, and climate adaptation. Examples included a rainwater collection pilot and community garden projects.

The presentation concluded with details of ongoing projects and a reaffirmation of the Council's commitment to its climate strategy goals.

Responding to a question related to the increase in reported electricity and gas consumption, the Head of Climate Action advised that the initial 2020 baseline only included 12 primary sites, selected due to their significant energy usage. By 2023, the scope had expanded to in excess of 500 sites, offering a far more comprehensive understanding of energy consumption across the Council's portfolio. The Head of Climate Action also noted the inclusion of non-corporate contract sites in an ongoing review, further enhancing the comprehensiveness of the data. This proactive approach aimed to eliminate residual gaps in reporting, but it may initially cause reported figures to rise.

The Chair asked a number of questions regarding Daneshill House and the proposed Civic Hub, raising concerns regarding inefficiencies in managing one of the Council's highest-emitting buildings. The Chair spoke of the importance of interim measures, given the time before the new hub is operational. In response, Officers explained that the building's heating and energy systems were outdated, making it extremely difficult and cost ineffective to implement a modern Building Management Plan or zoning system. They advised that they were exploring interim measures such as mothballing underused floors to reduce energy consumption and deploying LED lighting across different parts of the building. Behavioural change among staff, while promoted, had limitations.

The Chair expressed concern that the new hub could require retrofitting within a few years if sustainability measures were not prioritised during the design phase. They stressed the need for it to align with Stevenage Borough Council's climate leadership ambitions. The Chief Executive reassured the committee that sustainability was central to the hub's design. The Chief Executive suggested that Members may wish receive a presentation concerning sustainability in the hub from the scheme's Architects at an appropriate point in the design process.

Members asked questions related to waste management and the scope of carbon emissions accounting. The Head of Climate Action responded that 70% of residential waste was processed at energy-from-waste (EfW) facilities that likely used incineration. The Head of Climate Action explained that EfW contributed to carbon emissions but offset some fossil fuel energy generation. Currently, those emissions were not included in Stevenage's territorial emissions, as the facilities were outside the area. The Head of Climate Action assured Members that waste-related emissions would be given consideration under the developing of a Greenhouse Gas Reporting Strategy methodology for Scope 3 emissions.

A Member raised questions about passing the carbon burden to other areas due to Stevenage's zero-landfill policy. The Head of Climate Action indicated that the zero-landfill policy is a county-wide one and that these matters are commonly addressed in conjunction with HCC and the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership.

Members also questioned the availability of recycling bins in high streets, parks, and commercial areas.

Members queried the accuracy of data, including emissions from leisure centres and displaced emissions caused by staff working from home. The Head of Climate Action confirmed emissions data for specific sites like leisure centres was available and acknowledged that a comprehensive organisational emissions baseline was needed for accurate accounting. The Committee were informed that surveys had been issued to assess home energy use by staff, recognising the displacement of emissions from office space closures to private homes. The Portfolio Holder (Environment & Performance) commented about the importance of having good modelling and tracking methods to improve data accuracy and ensure comprehensive measurement of emissions and supported the ongoing expansion of data gathering.

Responding to a question related to housing decarbonisation target, the Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation) advised the Committee that the Council's decarbonisation programme was in part reliant on external match funding. Members asked for a breakdown of the EPC ratings for the whole of the Council's Housing Stock so that its possible to see the scale of the task to reach a minimum rating of C and what progress has been made. The Head of Climate Action indicated officers will provide this breakdown of the EPC ratings.

Members asked questions related to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO). The Head of Climate Action responded that the entire SBC fleet, previously running on diesel, had transitioned to HVO as of October 2024. The Head of Climate Action acknowledged that HVO was an interim solution until electric vehicle infrastructure and technologies became more viable. The Committee heard that large refuse and recycling freighters were more likely to adopt hydrogen technology and less likely to be electric due to the weight and size of the batteries that would be required. Members raised concerns related to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and recommended the introduction of quarterly or annual reports on BNG contributions, spending and achievements, ensuring public access to reports to enhance transparency and accountability.

Members highlighted recent decisions to replace shrub beds with grass which appeared to undermine biodiversity efforts. The Portfolio Holder (Environment and Performance) emphasised the need for joined up thinking regarding greenspaces and proposed that community maintenance agreements could be considered for residents who wished to retain those features.

The Chair invited Members to comment outside of the meeting on the updated climate emergency scrutiny review action tracker which was included in the agenda papers at pages 57 to 76. Members were encouraged to send any comments they had on this to the Scrutiny Officer or the Head of Climate Action.

#### 4 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

There was none.

5 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

6 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was none.

**CHAIR**

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## **Environment and Economy Committee – 12 12 24 - Skills Review**

### **Chantel Lommel, Head of Service – Step 2 Skills.**

- 1) Please give an overview of the role of Step2Skills in overcoming barriers to employment.
- 2) Who is a typical client for Step2Skills services, or is there a typical client?
- 3) The Step2Skills website and literature highlights the organizations courses, and partners courses. Clearly employability, maths and digital skills are a key part of your offer. However, there is also an emphasis on client's welfare and wellbeing. Please expand on the challenges that your clients can face, when considering entering, or re-entering the work, and what support is available.
- 4) Step2Skills offer short courses on creative activities. Please comment on the value of these activities in tackling poor mental health and increasing self-esteem, which appears to sit with a more holistic approach to tackling social exclusion and client wellbeing.
- 5) How important is your partner working with employers across Hertfordshire. Please highlight how they work with you, and the success that has been achieved.
- 6) How do you record and evaluate Step2Skills impact in overcoming barriers to employment, and how do you celebrate the learning journeys that your clients work through?

### **Matt Partridge – CEO Stevenage Borough Council and Deputy Chair Board Member Step2Skills.**

- 1) Please comment on your own involvement with Step2Skills, and what drew you to this role?
- 2) Why is Step2Skills work important to Stevenage, and can you comment on the challenges in the local employment market that Step2Skills strives to overcome.
- 3) How has the Bedwell Multiple projects made a difference to local residence?
- 4) Has SBC been directly involved in supporting Step2Skills clients through mock interviews, or offering work experience, or other practical support to assist them in to work?

### **Matt Partridge - CEO Stevenage Borough Council**

The strategic role of SBC in delivering a devolved skills agenda, with local partners and in a changing national framework.

- 1) This committee has heard a lot of compelling evidence from local schools, North Herts College, Stevenage, Hertfordshire County Council (LEP), and others on the emerging skills agenda in and around Stevenage. There are

definable skills shortages in Life Sciences, Advanced Engineering, Health and Social Care (Herts LSIP). What is SBC doing to address this, and help support local employers, and open good career opportunities for local residence?

- 2) Stevenage Works has a good track record in supporting learning and employment opportunities in construction. With good reason to believe this will continue as regeneration gathers pace in Stevenage. What challenges are ahead for Stevenage Works, as it moves in to supporting skills attainment in health and social care.
- 3) Does Stevenage Works have a future role in developing “green “skills, which are acknowledged as being a major challenge in achieving net zero, in areas like retrofit, insulation, solar, and heat pumps. As major public construction projects are planned in Stevenage, does an opportunity exists to grow this skills base, however small.
- 4) The government White Paper: Getting Britain Working was introduced in Parliament last week. (26/11/24). The proposals outlined are the most significant change in a generation. There is an expressed aim to ensure that Skills for England encourages a devolved, localised approach to skills and employment support services. In the years ahead, how do we ensure this approach flourishes, delivering good and stable jobs, and growing our local economy?

**Meeting** ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

**Portfolio Area** Economy Skills & Transport

**Date** 12 DECEMBER 2024



## DRAFT REPORT – SKILLS AGENDA REVIEW

Author – Stephen Weaver Ext No.2332

Contact Officer – Stephen Weaver Ext No.2332

Contributors – Councillor Rob Broom, Chair of Environment & Economy Select, Lead Assistant Director supporting the Committee, AD Stevenage Direct Services, Steve Dupoy. Daryl Jedowski, SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager.

## FORWARD FROM CHAIR – CLLR ROB BROOM

Whilst the committee has been working on the skills agenda, the government has brought a White Paper to Parliament (26/11/24), entitled Getting Britain Working. The White Paper covers a range of future policy relevance to this local review on skills and access to work. Much of which is contained in chapter 5 of the paper.

This chapter outlines the need to bring employment support and careers support closer together and acknowledges the current challenges with the Job Centre Plus and the National Careers Service.

The case for change cites that too few employers are using Job Centre Plus to recruit staff. The 2022 national figure showed 14% of employers used Job Centre Plus. Job Centre Plus and the National Careers Service, have insufficiently unlooked progression and career opportunities for claimants, with no measurable outcomes from the Department of Works and Pensions, and the Department of Education, for effective skills guidance.

Job Centre Plus approach is considered too centralised and does not value collaboration with local partners. The employment support provided is insufficiently personalised and focussed on benefit compliance.

The following areas will guide the future development of the service:

- 1) Aligning employment support so that it works better with skills and careers advice.
- 2) Enhanced relationship with local employers.
- 3) Principle of localism embedded in new service.
- 4) A nationally enhanced digital offer, where people can access support through channels that best meet their need.
- 5) Emphasis on personalised support.

Sanctioning of welfare benefits and conditionality will remain, but there will no longer be, local or national targets setting for sanctions, as a performance indicator.

Pilots of the new approach are going ahead in Wolsey, East Kilbride, Stratford and Porthcawl.

The importance of Skills England working with local authorities, business, and education providers, and embedding the model of Local Skills Improvement Plans. Hertfordshire has a working document in place already. It is clear to see that the work already taking place in Stevenage, will serve the town well, to develop a local skills strategy within this emerging framework.

## **1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To consider the report and recommendations of the Environment & Economy Select Committee Scrutiny review into the skills agenda and how the Council is working with partners to maximise the opportunities of local residents to the job opportunities in the expanding employment sectors of life-sciences, aerospace and regeneration in Stevenage.

## **2 BACKGROUND & SCRUTINY ISSUES IDENTIFIED**

- 2.1 When Members considered their work programme for the 2024-25 Municipal Year at its meeting on 12 February 2024 it was agreed to include a review item on the Skills Agenda and the way the Council was promoting and working with partners to provide opportunities for local residents in employment opportunities in the growth industries in Stevenage. The Committee had received a presentation on the Skills Agenda earlier in March 2024 which had laid the ground for a main scrutiny review for the Committee in the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

### **2.2 Scope and focus of the review**

- 2.3 The Committee met on 16 July 2024 [E&E Select Committee - 16 July 2024 - Scoping Document](#) to agree the scope for the review, and it agreed should consider the following areas:
  - Enquire about existing data re Stevenage Young People destinations post 16-18 education?
  - What opportunities are out there re STEM training and job opportunities including apprenticeships?
  - How can more young people from Stevenage find employment in the booming sectors of life-science, space industry and regeneration?

- What are the barriers to older people retraining and re-entering into employment?

## 2.3 Process of the review

2.3.1 The Committee met formally on 3 occasions in 2024 and informally with two site visits on 27 September and 18 October to undertake the review and received input from the following groups and people on the following dates:

- 16 July 2024 – draft scoping document and PowerPoint Presentation presented by Daryl Jedowski, SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager.
- 17 September 2024 – Interviews with Greta Gardiner, SBC Investment Project Support Manager who oversees the Stevenage Works programme, and Charlotte Blizzard-Welch, CEO of Stevenage Citizens Advice.
- 27 September 2024 – Site visit to North Herts College Science Innovation & Technology Centre (SITEC), with input from NH College CEO, Kit Davies, NH College Executive Director Corporate Services, Lizzie Jones and NH College Deputy Principal, Keith Turner.
- 8 October 2024 - Interviews with Theresa Kilworth, Barnardo's Children's Services), Jackie Johnson, Deputy Head at Barnwell Secondary School, Lahaina Sutherland, Stevenage Youth Mayor and Frankie Duncan, Stevenage Deputy Youth Mayor.
- 18 October 2024 - Site visit to Airbus, with input from Lucinda Williams, Jo Roberston, Head of Early Careers and Dave Ledger Senior Aerospace Engineer

2.3.2 At the 12 December 2024 meeting the Committee will interview representatives from Step2Skills in Hertfordshire.

2.3.3 Photo from the site visit to the Airbus Mars Yard, which houses the Mars Rover.



### **3 REVIEW FINDINGS**

- 3.1 Activity that Stevenage Borough Council is leading on regarding the Skills Agenda:
- 3.2 Background to the Council's leadership on the local skills market – The Skills Framework and establishment of Stevenage Works. The catalyst for the Council's focus on the skills agenda has been the funding provided from the Community Renewal Fund, UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Mission 44, the Charity founded by Sir Lewis Hamilton aimed at widening opportunity to diverse communities. This funding of £2.75M has been used to develop a Skills Framework for Stevenage and the Council's Stevenage Works programme, which promotes opportunity for construction and other careers linked to the Council's contracts working with contractors offering apprenticeships and other opportunities via the social value of the contracts.
- 3.3 The Stevenage Works Skills Framework has three main focuses; (i) Building Partnership to align and coordinate local partners and assets; (ii) Creating opportunities; and (iii) Embedding and enabling through backing skills opportunities via capital investment linked to the Council's regeneration plans.
- 3.4 The Stevenage Works initiative was born from a collaboration between Stevenage Borough Council, North Herts College, and Job Centre Plus in 2017/18.
- 3.5 Under Stevenage Works contractors working on large developments in the town were required to create a skills plan under Section 106, which was monitored by Stevenage Works. If they failed to meet their commitments, financial penalties were imposed, and funds were redirected to training initiatives. Regular negotiations took place with developers, ensuring they fulfilled their social value obligations, such as providing apprenticeships and engaging in community projects.
- 3.6 Stevenage Works has helped more than 550 individuals attend training courses and more than 180 obtaining CSCS Cards for construction site work. Some contractors assisted with CV writing and mock interviewing, contributing to upskilling efforts within the local community.
- 3.7 Many referrals to Stevenage Works come from Jobcentre Plus. However, people could self-refer, and Stevenage Works provide additional funding for vulnerable individuals. They also collaborate with organisations like Track and Step2Skills to ensure disabled and vulnerable individuals were supported through flexible apprenticeship schemes and specialised training.
- 3.8 Plans to expand Stevenage Works beyond construction, with initial discussions focussed on health and social care sectors are welcomed by Members.
- 3.9 Upskilling - Hearing evidence from the Chief Executive of Stevenage Citizen's Advice, it was acknowledged that low-skilled, low-paid jobs often led to financial instability and subsequently a higher risk of homelessness. Insecure work with fluctuating hours made it difficult for individuals to achieve stability and think about growth. Therefore, a recommendation to encourage all partners including the DWP, Citizens Advice, Step2Skills, the Council and



SMEs and larger employers was needed to help lower skilled individuals obtain the skills they need to access higher skilled and higher paid roles which would directly tackle the problems associated with insecure employment from low-skilled, low-paid work.

3.10 Challenges for parents with childcare availability and costs

3.11 The Committee received evidence from Stevenage Barnardo's Children Centre which informed them that Parents often found the information related to government support for childcare confusing, particularly when accessing funding through online platforms. Many struggled to understand what they were entitled to, and this issue was compounded for those without internet access or with limited literacy skills.

3.12 While parents could access 15 hours of funded childcare, they often had to pay for additional hours, particularly outside term time. This led many to rely on informal family support during holidays.

3.13 While no weekend childcare provision currently exists in Stevenage, it might be something that would need to be considered in the future, particularly as more parents returned to work in roles that fell outside of traditional working hours. This could form a recommendation encouraging Government to make funding available to do this.

3.14 While most nurseries were managing, they faced difficulties in recruitment, particularly for staff to cover opening and closing times. For most settings, the loss of just one key staff member would significantly affect their operations.

3.15 The potential of new T-level qualifications that involved hands-on learning, could help nurseries train staff more efficiently. North Herts College should be recommended to promote this qualification.

3.16 Secondary School perspective to the skills challenge

3.17 The Committee received evidence from Jackie Johnson, Deputy Head at Barnwell Secondary School who highlighted:

3.18 The strong partnership between secondary schools in Stevenage, specifically in sharing resources due to teacher shortages. The Stevenage 6th Form Partnership struggled to recruit and retain experienced STEM teachers which particularly affected students studying for A-Level science subjects.

3.19 The relationship between schools and North Herts College was slightly competitive, given that both offer post-16 programmes. Members understood the competitive nature of this sector but identified this as a clear problem, whereas all post 16 education should be working collaboratively to offer as many and varied opportunities to young people they are pitted against each other in an artificial internal education market to compete against each other for student head counts and the related funding. This is a major weakness with regards to offering the best choices for young people.

- 3.20 Barnwell School has a successful collaboration with the University of Hertfordshire, benefiting from its widening access programme. This provides financial support, enabling Barnwell to run programmes like the Brilliant Club, which helps raise aspirations by giving students access to top universities like Oxford and Cambridge. Jackie Johnson praised the University's efforts in promoting higher education and broadening student horizons, noting that it had helped students see university as a viable path.
- 3.21 Regarding mentoring this is a significant focus at Barnwell School, supported by programmes like "Zero Gravity", which helped disadvantaged students connect with undergraduates to support their university applications. The Committee thought that this was an excellent initiative.
- 3.22 Barnwell School has a "homegrown talent pipeline" where older students mentored younger ones, helping to create a supportive educational environment. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds particularly benefited, as they often lacked parental support or role models. Mentoring from slightly older peers, who had firsthand experience, resonated more with students than when advice came from teachers. The school is looking to create a "mentoring spiral" that could extend beyond secondary schools to include partnerships with primary schools.
- 3.23 Post-COVID mental health issues had risen, and schools faced challenges with attendance and behaviour. The Committee heard that while schools had various support networks in place, connecting with local employers, especially post-COVID, had become more difficult, particularly due to hybrid working environments. Members heard that schools experience post covid had been that face-to-face work experience had become less accessible, which affected students' development of employability skills.
- 3.24 Regarding degree apprenticeships, the Committee were advised that they were difficult to access for students with no prior industry experience, which often skewed national statistics. Apprenticeships were highly competitive, and students needed more support in preparing for the interview processes.
- 3.25 Members explored the landscape for students who weren't academically inclined or motivated, particularly those who might chose subjects like "triple sport" because there weren't enough places in more relevant vocational courses. They pointed out the issue of students working long hours in low-paid jobs, sometimes out of necessity due to the cost of living and worried that those students lack clear pathways to fulfilling careers and often remained in jobs with limited prospects.
- 3.26 Jackie Johnson, Deputy Head at Barnwell Secondary School acknowledged Members concerns, noting that schools must balance offering courses with ensuring students didn't fail due to poor subject suitability. The Committee heard of a pre-apprenticeship programme aimed at vulnerable students who would struggle with traditional academic routes, but also the difficulties of limited resources in schools. Jackie advised that while some students



needed to pursue alternative qualifications or careers, it could be argued that sometimes those pathways could lead to future opportunities.

3.27 Young people perspective

3.28 The Youth Mayor expressed concerns about the lack of specialised career advisors available in Schools. Some schools are operating on one career advisor for a school size of 900 pupils and when there are vacancies schools can be left with no advisor in place for months before a replacement is recruited.

3.29 Members heard about the importance of encouraging students to apply for opportunities like work placements, as many felt discouraged due to competitiveness and a fear of entering professional environments.

3.30 Careers advice in some schools was limited to a single brief session and there was insufficient focus or guidance in helping students explore their career options.

3.31 There was a general focus in schools on preparing students for university over apprenticeships or employment, with little information about alternative routes available. Members expressed concerns regarding the lack of specialist, in person, careers advice available for students in schools acknowledging budget constraints.

3.32 Mock interviews were useful but needed to be more frequent and it was not clear how widespread the offer was amongst local secondary schools. School's efforts to assist students with CV writing was seen as helpful, although some resources, such as Unifrog, were found to be less helpful.

3.33 Gaining relevant work experience was seen as a vital skill for young people. Members commented that there appeared to be a significant disparity in access to careers advice for young people across schools in Stevenage. It was noted that certain students missed out on opportunities due to lack of information, with one suggestion being the creation of a dedicated page on the Council's website where work experience providers, and other businesses, could share key details such as open days, work experience opportunities and application deadlines. It was also suggested that such a page could include captions from officers, from across the Council, sharing their views on the specific skills required for certain job roles. Members noted that the Council's website was perhaps not be a natural place for young people to find out about work experience opportunities. However, it may help parents and carers as well as students. In addition, other online platforms for information sharing could be considered by officers. Members will make a recommendation to utilise the Council web site and promote other platforms to interested young people to employers in the area who can offer work experience.

- 3.34 North Herts College Site visit evidence
- 3.35 The college, student, employee collaboration is impressive, especially Airbus GSK, Lister Hospital and UCL. The emerging skills pipeline is being built.
- 3.36 The level of tech being used, the laboratory practice skills, VR Tech, and the use of industry tech in the college setting is impressive.
- 3.37 EV maintenance facilities /Engineering campus planned for near future, building the sustainable green skills base is welcomed.
- 3.38 The gaming course, and the preparation for creative opportunities was important, as well as the opening of a film facility on the Hitchin Campus. Clearly, a serious attempt is being made to develop skills for the creative as well as scientific roles in the local economy. Not being spoken about enough, or awareness being raised.
- 3.39 There needs to be more celebration of success, by the council, college, schools where students attain really good skills outcomes, as they in turn become the role models for successive years of students. Is this happening anywhere? We show pride in the outcomes that are being realised. Members to make a recommendation regarding promoting success stories from the local community.
- 3.40 FE colleges are hopeful that the new body Skills England will make a tangible link to a national and regional industrial strategy which will replace the ad-hoc approach that has been in place.
- 3.41 Through the college's strategy and focus to (i) support the Stevenage vision for growth and regeneration (ii) work with key industries in the region and (iii) create industry standard training, they are tangibly doing this. Autolus (a new life science company based in the centre of Stevenage focused on cancer T-cell therapies) have made a link with the college, and they are delivering their Lab Technicians Programme at the College, they were previously using a facility in Manchester. This is also creating a pipeline of potential graduate apprenticeships for Autolus from the college.
- 3.42 By providing Industry standard facilities and equipment the college are equipping young people with the skills they need to move straight into higher level courses, apprenticeships or employment and are responding to what employers have been saying for some time that young entrants don't have the necessary skills to be work ready.
- 3.43 Airbus Site visit evidence
- 3.43.1 Members undertook a site visit to Airbus and received input from with input from Lucinda Williams, Jo Roberston, Head of Early Careers and Dave Ledger Senior Aerospace Engineer.

- 3.43.2 The Airbus offer includes a comprehensive recruitment strategy including a skills mapping of the workforce. The company offers interns, apprenticeships, and graduate scheme. Airbus like to grow internal candidates and diversity was important. Alumni go into their old universities to create contacts for potential recruiting. There is advertising for direct entry to apprenticeships and for permanent roles.
- 3.44 Airbus stated that they are flexible on their criteria for GCSE and A Level entry. There are currently 400 applicants for level 3 & 4 Apprenticeships.
- 3.45 Members heard the Airbus also provide a re-skilling focus for adults. The mid-career upskill is a sponsored education programme aimed at mature adults. The programme recruits people who have an existing 70% fit with the organisation and provide 2 years of training sponsored by Airbus to upskill the 30% that they require as an employer, the example shared was someone working in Robotics.
- 3.46 Degree Apprenticeships are in high demand, for 20 posts Airbus receives 6500 applications. Candidates that do not make the cut for the 20 spaces but showed good aptitude are directed to cluster up and down stream supply companies for their own employment programmes.
- 3.47 Airbus provides a virtual work experience programme, which had 3200 attendees in November 2021.
- 3.48 Airbus provides and outreach into local schools with ambassadors in the community. This is part of the company's social value with its STEM education outreach to local Secondary and Primary Schools. Airbus has an outreach to ex-service personal and is very active in employment to this cohort.
- 3.49 Diversity is a challenge and a focus in its recruitment of more women and from a wider ethnic background.
- 3.50 The biggest challenge for Airbus is keeping their current workforce open to change, new ideas and ways of working.
- 3.51 Input from Step2Skills – following 12 December input outline key findings.
- 3.52 Areas the review did not cover but could be a focus for the Council going forward:
- Primary School pupils – opening up possible career ideas at a young age and seeing what paths there are to get there?
  - Re-skilling of mature adults 50 years plus

## 4 REVIEW RECOMMENNDATIONS

- 4.1 **Recommendation 1 – Expansion of Stevenage Works** - It is recommended that the Council be encouraged to expand Stevenage Works beyond construction into the health and social care sectors.
- 4.2 **Recommendation 2 – Upskilling** - It is recommended that all partners including the DWP, Citizens Advice, Step2Skills, the Council and SMEs and larger employers should be encouraged to do this. Efforts from all partners would be needed to help lower skilled individuals obtain the skills they need to access higher skilled and higher paid roles which would directly tackle the problems associated with insecure employment from low-skilled, low-paid work.
- 4.3 **Recommendation 3 – Extension of funding for childcare-** It is recommended that Members and Officers lobby the Government to make funding available for childcare provision at weekends, particularly as more parents returned to work in roles that fell outside of traditional working hours.
- 4.4 **Recommendation 4 – Promotion of the T-Level qualification for nursery childcare into the local economy** - The potential of new T-level qualifications that involved hands-on learning, could help nurseries train staff more efficiently. It is recommended that North Herts College be encouraged to expand the T-Level qualification in nursery care to help train more people locally to expand the provision of trained staff.
- 4.5 **Recommendation 5 – Competition for post 16 education** - It is recommended that Members and Officers lobby the Government regarding the unhelpful internal funding model and relationship between schools and post 16 education technical colleges to compete against each other for student head counts and the related funding. This is a major weakness with regards to offering the best choices for young people regarding the best fit of educational qualifications and training.
- 4.6 **Recommendation 6 – Promotion of work experience opportunities** - It is recommended that the Council's Business Relationship Manager works with colleagues to promote opportunities for young people to connect with local employers for work experience and that the Council web site and other platforms be utilised to promote interested young people to employers in the area who can offer work experience to share key details such as open days, work experience opportunities and application deadlines.
- 4.7 **Recommendation 7 – Promotion of success stories from Stevenage-** It is recommended that members and officers consider ways to promote success stories from the local community, celebrating successes by the college and schools where students attain excellent skills outcomes, as they in turn become the role models for successive years of students.
- 4.8 **Recommendation 8 – Commendation to North Herts College and Barnwell School for their work in promoting skills** - It is recommended that North Herts College and Barnwell School be commended for their work

to promote skills to their students. North Herts College by providing Industry standard facilities and equipment the college are equipping young people with the skills they need to move straight into higher level courses, apprenticeships or employment and are responding to what employers have been saying for some time that young entrants don't have the necessary skills to be work ready. Barnwell School are offering an excellent peer to peer mentoring to ready pupils for university applications and interviews as well as collaboration with the University of Hertfordshire through their "zero gravity" and "Brilliant Club" initiatives.

## **5 IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial Implications**

5.1 Nothing specific in relation to the report.

### **Legal Implications**

5.2 Nothing specific in relation to the report.

### **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

5.3 There are specific equalities and diversity implications based on the following groups:

- Age – The review has focused predominantly on the impact of Young People, and it has also addressed to a lesser extent the impact on adults returning to employment or retraining. The Chair has indicated that any future work should focus on interventions with primary school aged children and with adults over 50 years old.
- Sex – No definitive position can be defined for the current impact on women accessing the skills opportunities via education, Schools and FE Colleges, and job opportunities in the burgeoning life science and aerospace industries in Stevenage. However, based on anecdotal evidence there appears to be some progress in attracting women to these roles but further enquiry would be needed to ascertain with any accuracy to what level women are accessing these roles.

## **APPENDICES**

A - [Scoping Document](#)

B - [Skills Review Mapping Document](#)

## **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

[Stevenage Works Skills Framework - Unlocking Jobs, Skills and Opportunities for local people](#)

[Government White Paper - Get Britain Working](#)

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