

Cabinet Member & Partners Response to Environment & Economy Select Committee review of the local Skills Agenda
Recommendations and final report

Date Recommendations of final report agreed by Environment & Economy Select Committee on 14 January 2025:

(Circulated to Cabinet Member and external partners 24 February 2025*)

*Circulation delayed due to rewriting of recommendations

Date responses should be made by:

Cabinet and partners responses should be received by
25 April 2025

Recommendations:

Expansion of Stevenage Works

Recommendation 1 – (i) 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. **(ii) Expansion of Stevenage Works into “Green Construction” Solar and air source heat pump technology** - It is recommended that the Council be encouraged to expand Stevenage Works into a third iteration beyond health and social care sectors into Green Technologies.

Executive & Partner Response:

Response supported by SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski, Investment Support Grant Manager, Greta Gardiner and Cabinet Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Economy, Skills & Transport, Cllr Lloyd Briscoe:

Stevenage Works has proven to be an invaluable initiative in providing apprenticeships and job experience in the construction sector. By leveraging the numerous building developments in Stevenage including the Council’s extensive regeneration projects — including town centre redevelopment, housing development, and the maintenance of council-owned properties — which include the Stevenage Works has successfully created opportunities for residents to gain vital industry experience.

<p>Action: SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski.</p>	<p><i>Recognising the importance of broadening the scope of Stevenage Works, the Council is actively working to expand into the health and social care sectors. This will be a significant workstream over the 2025/26 period, ensuring that Stevenage Works continues to meet the needs of a rapidly evolving workforce and supports residents in accessing stable, rewarding careers.</i></p> <p><i>With respect to Green Construction, the Council acknowledges the growing importance of sustainable building technologies, including solar and air source heat pump technology. However, rather than establishing a separate workstream, these elements are already being embedded within the existing construction focus of Stevenage Works. Given the increasing adoption of green construction techniques across the industry, we see this as an organic evolution rather than a distinct third iteration of the initiative. We appreciate the committee's insights on this matter and will continue to ensure that sustainability remains a core component of our construction training programmes.</i></p>
<p><u>Recommendation 2 – Upskilling</u> - 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, especially affecting a cohort of people aged in their late 20s to early 40s who still had decades left in the workforce.</p> <p>Action: SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski to lead on this and reach out to partners.</p>	<p><i>Response for SBC supported by SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski and Cabinet Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Economy, Skills & Transport, Cllr Lloyd Briscoe:</i></p> <p><i>Addressing skills gaps across different age groups is a central focus of the Council's workforce development strategy. The Stevenage Works Skills Framework provides a structured approach to supporting three primary cohorts: young people entering the workforce, adults who are currently unemployed, and adults in employment seeking to upskill or transition into new career pathways.</i></p> <p><i>Through our allocation of the UK Shared Prosperity fund we have been working in partnership with Hertfordshire Futures over the last three years. This delivery model has allowed us to act as commissioners in our</i></p>

	<p><i>relationship with Hertfordshire Futures, allowing us to tailor the programme to local needs.</i></p> <p><i>This support is aimed at businesses and residents with programmes offering training opportunities that can be accessed by the 20s to 40s cohort referenced in the recommendation.</i></p> <p><i>Government has confirmed a continuation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for the 2025/26 financial year and we have agreed a further commitment to continue a suite of interventions in partnership with Hertfordshire Futures.</i></p>
<p><u>Recommendation 3 – Promotion of apprenticeships supporting nursery childcare for the local economy</u> - Apprenticeships in nursery childcare would both support parents in the local economy with the provision of more childcare and would support the apprentice to learn new skills and earn an income helping towards living costs whilst being trained. Members are aware that this is a national policy area which the Council can lobby on but has no direct control over.</p> <p>Action: SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski to liaise with external partners in the childcare sector.</p>	<p><i>Response for SBC supported by SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski and Cabinet Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Economy, Skills & Transport, Cllr Lloyd Briscoe:</i></p> <p><i>The Council acknowledges the importance of increasing the availability of apprenticeships in nursery childcare, both to support working parents and to provide meaningful career opportunities for apprentices. While national policy plays a significant role in shaping this sector, we are committed to exploring local opportunities in collaboration with North Herts College and other training providers.</i></p> <p><i>As highlighted during the committee's review, North Herts College already offers flexible vocational career programmes and is responsive to local employer demands. The Council will engage with the college to determine how existing training provisions can be expanded to support the childcare sector and explore how apprenticeship programmes in this area can be effectively promoted within the local community.</i></p>
<p><u>Recommendation 4 – Challenge to HCC & Local Children Centres regarding providing clear accessible information on what funding is available for families for childcare</u> – The funding position is currently confusing to parents so clarity would help in this area.</p>	<p><i>Response from HCC Children's Services & Local Children Centres:</i></p>

<p>Action: HCC Children's Services & Local Children Centres</p>	
<p><u>Recommendation 5 – Promotion of work experience opportunities</u> - It is recommended that (i) the Council's Business Relationship Manager, Mena Caldbeck and the Enterprise & Skills Partnership Officer works with colleagues and local employers to promote opportunities for young people to connect with those local employers for work experience; (ii) That SBC offers a range of work experience opportunities for young people across the organisation, and that these are offered consistently every year to local schools and colleges; and (iii) That SBC social media is used to share local job fares, open days, and work experience opportunities.</p> <p>Action: SBC Business Relationship Manager, Mena Caldbeck SBC Enterprise & Skills Partnership Officer, Carol Richardson</p>	<p><i>Response from the SBC Business Relationship Manager, Mena Caldbeck and Enterprise & Skills Partnership Officer, Carol Richardson:</i></p> <p><i>The Council has a strong track record of supporting work experience initiatives and is committed to expanding these opportunities further. One of our flagship initiatives is Generation Stevenage, an annual employment and skills event run in partnership with Hertfordshire Futures. This is part of a series of 'Generation' events throughout Hertfordshire. This event connects young people with local employers, providing them with first-hand insight into career pathways across various industries.</i></p> <p><i>In 2025, the Council will enhance its direct work experience offerings, collaborating with four local schools—Barnwell, Nobel, Marriotts, and St John Henry Newman—to facilitate placements for both Year 10 and Year 12 students. We see this as an essential step in demonstrating our leadership in promoting work experience and encouraging businesses to follow suit.</i></p> <p><i>Social media remains an important tool in engaging young people with work experience and job opportunities. The Council will work closely with its communications team and educational partners to ensure that information about work experience placements, job fairs, and career development programmes reaches the widest possible audience through platforms preferred by young people.</i></p>
<p><u>Recommendation 6 – Promotion of success stories from Stevenage</u>- 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 show personal development or attain excellent skills outcomes, as they in turn become the role models for successive years of students, i.e. 'Mayors Award for</p>	<p><i>Response from SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski and the Leader on behalf of the civic office of the Mayor:</i></p> <p><i>Celebrating the achievements of local individuals is an effective way to inspire future generations and showcase the opportunities available in Stevenage. The Council already recognises outstanding achievements</i></p>

<p>Achievement'. This could be focused on those who have overcome challenges to achieve personal development, rather than focusing on the high academic achievers who traditionally already receive the recognition.</p> <p>Action: SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski to liaise with the Leader</p>	<p><i>through the Stevenage Together Awards, which include the Rising Star category.</i></p> <p><i>In response to this recommendation, we propose either enhancing the existing award or introducing a new accolade focused on individuals who have overcome challenges to achieve personal and professional growth. This initiative would align with the Council's commitment to supporting those from diverse backgrounds and promoting social mobility.</i></p> <p><i>To further elevate this recognition, we suggest that this award be overseen by the Youth Mayor, adding a new layer of engagement and credibility among young residents.</i></p>
<p><u>Recommendation 7 – Promotion of a clear local careers advice service</u> (i) Work with partners towards a credible local careers advice service. Establishing a clear source of objective careers information which is available to pupils, students, and those wanting to re-train, or change direction. That a local link within the National Careers service is readily available, and that this reflects national standards in career entry qualifications, but also what is available in Stevenage, and wider Hertfordshire; and (ii) Members proposed consideration of the creation of a centralised information hub on the council's website to provide accessible details about job opportunities, training, apprenticeships, and other resources. This platform would also allow businesses, schools, and colleges to contribute information.</p> <p>Action: SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski SBC Enterprise & Skills Partnership Officer, Carol Richardson – regarding links to the Hertfordshire Opportunities Portal (HOP).</p>	<p><i>Response from Response for SBC supported by SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski SBC Enterprise & Skills Partnership Officer, Carol Richardson and Cabinet Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Economy, Skills & Transport, Cllr Lloyd Briscoe:</i></p> <p><i>The Council acknowledges the need for clear and accessible careers advice and supports the continued development of the Hertfordshire Opportunities Portal. This platform, managed by Hertfordshire Futures, already serves as a key resource for schools, students, and jobseekers in the region. Rather than duplicating efforts, in response to this recommendation we would aim to enhance the visibility of this resource by improving signposting on the Council's website and through our outreach efforts.</i></p> <p><i>Additionally, we are exploring opportunities to expand the Stevenage-specific content on the portal, ensuring that residents can easily access information about local training programmes, apprenticeships, and job opportunities. This builds on work undertaken through the council's successful funding application to the Community Renewal Fund in 2022. As part of this we led on a countywide initiative to increase visibility of Public Sector careers on the HOP platform.</i></p>

<p><u>Recommendation 8 – Commendation to North Herts College and Barnwell School for their work in promoting skills</u> - It is recommended that North Herts College and Barnwell School be commended for their work to promote skills to their students (Noting that for context the review only interviewed these two academic institutions, but Members are aware of other good practice towards enhancing skills that is happening in the area). 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.</p> <p>Action: SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski to reach out to partners at NH College and Barnwell School.</p>	<p><i>Response supported by SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski to NH College and Barnwell School</i></p> <p><i>The Council recognises the exceptional work of North Herts College and Barnwell School in equipping students with essential skills for their future careers. Both institutions play a pivotal role in the local skills landscape and have been instrumental in working in partnership with us to augment local skills provision.</i></p> <p><i>As part of our commitment to acknowledging their contributions, we will formally commend both institutions and work with them to develop case studies highlighting their impactful programmes. These case studies will be shared across our social media platforms to inspire students and showcase best practices in skills development.</i></p>
<p>Recommendation 9 – Devolved, local skills strategy.</p> <p>'One size fits all' solutions towards skills are ineffective. Localised strategies are better suited to address skill shortages.</p> <p>(i) That SBC along with its partners in the broadest sense (Herts Growth Board, Job Centre Plus, North Herts College, Local Secondary Schools, Local Employers) continue to work to develop and genuine, local skills strategy, which reflect local skills opportunities and challenges within the local economy; (ii) partners consider the provision of targeted support to engage those in insecure roles, providing a second-chance for those already in work but looking to transition to more fulfilling and secure career opportunities.</p>	<p><i>Response supported by SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski and Cabinet Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Economy, Skills & Transport, Cllr Lloyd Briscoe:</i></p> <p><i>The Stevenage Works Skills Framework, approved by Cabinet in February 2024, serves as a guiding document for the Council's localised approach to skills development. Alongside this, key documents such as the Stevenage Town Investment Plan, Stevenage 2040 Investment Prospectus, and the emerging Hertfordshire Economy Strategy, ensures a cohesive and locally relevant approach to skills development that links into the council's broader strategic ambitions and provides a local iteration of the approach being adopted across the county.</i></p>

<p>Action: SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski</p>	<p><i>This is further cemented by the inclusion of Enterprise & Skills as a headline priority as part of the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan (2024-27) which highlights the importance to the administration, despite the statutory responsibility for Skills provision resting with the County Council. The need for a localised approach that best responds to the needs of Stevenage residents was a primary driving factor behind this inclusion and gives officers a clear mandate to galvanise local partners</i></p> <p><i>Rather than being static document, the framework contains an action plan which guides an ambitious, ongoing programme of activities aimed at addressing local skills shortages and improving employment opportunities for residents. In the continued development of the Skills Framework we will draw in the committee's recommendations, especially those referenced here and recommendation 2 around Upskilling.</i></p>
<p>Recommendation 10: Collaboration with Employers to Promote Employment Opportunities</p> <p>The Council continues to engage and build on the widest possible cohort for opportunities, continuing to engage with employers in the aerospace and pharmaceutical industries and recruiters in Stevenage, to ensure high-skilled job opportunities are widely advertised and accessible to local residents. Many high-paid, high-skilled jobs are not visible to job seekers, as they are often gatekept by recruiters. The review proposes working with companies and recruiters to address this because collaboration with local businesses was essential to bridge the gap and increase awareness of available opportunities.</p> <p>Action: SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski.</p>	<p><i>Response supported by SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski and Cabinet Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Economy, Skills & Transport, Cllr Lloyd Briscoe:</i></p> <p><i>The Council continues to work closely with local employers, including those in the aerospace and pharmaceutical industries, to ensure that high-quality job opportunities are accessible to Stevenage residents.</i></p> <p><i>As previously referenced, the Hertfordshire Opportunities Portal remains the primary jobs board supported by the Council, and we actively work with businesses to increase their visibility and engagement with the platform.</i></p> <p><i>The Council is optimistic about future employment prospects in Stevenage with many local businesses, particularly as they scale up operations, require skilled technicians and mid-level specialists providing more accessible opportunities to high paying meaningful work to our residents.</i></p>

	<p><i>A specific example of this, is Autolus, who have just moved into premises in the town centre, and who have established an apprenticeship programme through North Herts College.</i></p> <p><i>Such initiatives provide highly skilled technical roles that do not require traditional university degrees, broadening access to stable and well-paying careers. We will continue to foster employer collaboration to ensure that more residents benefit from these opportunities.</i></p>
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