Hertfordshire Futures Board

Agenda item 6 – CEO Update			
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Policy & Government Updates

Local Government Reorganisation & Devolution

Update provided at Board meeting

Staffing and organisational updates

Chantal Lommel left her role as Step2Skills Head of Service on 26 August after 12 years in the post. Evelyn Djan and Jo Beazley have been appointed temporary Head of Service whilst a review of the Employment, Skills and Careers function within Hertfordshire Futures is completed.

Kelly Dowling has joined the team on a fixed term contract (funded via a grant from ICB) as the Get Hertfordshire Working – WorkWell Lead. Recruitment is underway for the Herts IQ Nickey Line Programme Manager as well as a Careers Hub Modern Day Work Experience Lead for the Aspiring Pathways Programme. Both are fixed term contracts and funded via external grant funding. The Assurance and Monitoring Executive (replacing Vicky Cox) and ESSV Project Lead (fixed term funded from external funding) roles have both been recruited to and the pre-employment checks are currently being completed.

As part of the role reviews following the reduction in hours for Norman Jennings, Caroline Cartwright has been appointed Head of Skills (Strategy) and will lead on skills strategies, commissioning and procurement of key programmes as well as continuing to lead on the delivery of major skills solutions across a wide range of programmes. Sally Stanley is now Operations Manager and will continue manage the operational running of the Hertfordshire Futures Team and Board and working alongside Norman, will take on additional responsibilities around finance and budgets.

Other items to note

GSK/ Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst (Update provided via separate Board paper)

Following the recent GSK announcement to relocate, Hertfordshire Futures has been working in partnership with Stevenage Borough Council to establish a taskforce to discuss the impact of the site closure. The Taskforce has and will continue to engage with GSK to establish whether there will be a phased move to the new sites in Cambridge and Ware in 2028/2029 or whether a hard date has been fixed and therefore any impact on employment locally. In the meantime, Hertfordshire Futures and Stevenage Borough Council are developing a draft Implementation Plan to examine the potential future use of the GSK site, how businesses can be supported, skills requirements and the long-term vision. The loss of GSK will have an impact, however the Lifesciences sector remains strong, there is a growth in Advance Manufacturing, particularly round Defence (inc MBDA, Airbus) and there remains a demand for good quality employment sites in the area. Paul Witcombe has been working with Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst (SBC) who are based within the GSK site, to get a better understanding of how it needs to position itself for the future. SBC agrees that it has evolved from an incubator supporting early-stage venture rounds into a scale-up ecosystem capable of

generating IPOs, major follow-on financings, and high-value exits. One of SBC's strongest differentiators is the relationship with the Cell & Gene Therapy Catapult Manufacturing Innovation Centre. Since completion this has been a major competitive advantage for the Stevenage campus. The co-location of SBC, CGT Catapult, manufacturing facilities, and therapy developers is relatively unusual internationally.

Airbus Defence and Space

Hertfordshire Futures is working with Exemplas to set up a virtual 'Meet the Stakeholder' session with IUK's Innovation and Growth Advisors in the East of England. This is to highlight the opportunities for SMEs aligned to the Airbus LaunchPad. Supported by the UK Space Agency's Space Clusters Infrastructure Fund (SCIF), the Airbus Launchpad provides a unique, collaborative environment designed to accelerate innovation. Residents gain access to our high-tech lab facilities, including robotics, AR, VR, and rapid prototyping—and the opportunity to work directly alongside Airbus experts.

MBDA

The prime minister has announced intentions to share MBDA cruise missile blueprints with Ukraine in support of the UK's ongoing commitment to support the besieged state. For MBDA Stevenage, this is broadly positive news from a business and employment perspective. The announcement suggests continued government backing for long-range missile capabilities, likely sustaining engineering work, production activity (predominantly in the North West), and future investment. The most significant opportunity is not necessarily the immediate manufacture of more missiles, but MBDA's growing role as the key technical authority supporting European missile capability and Ukrainian self-sufficiency.

Herts IQ Growth Investment Fund:

Rothamsted have submitted a FBC application for £2.0m to set up an innovation investment programme, targeted at high growth agri-tech businesses addressing climate change and other environmental issues and opportunities .

The Growth Initiative Fund, valued at £1.5m is being launched through the Herts Growth Hub to provide grant funding of £20-30k for high growth potential businesses .

Round 1 Projects awarded £2.1m of grant funding for nine projects across the HIQ area, all projects are underway. Further projects have been approved totalling £0.42m under Round 2A.

Herts IQ Board has approved additional funding of £5m for an open call under Round 2B Open Call. This is now going through the process of being approved by HIQ's four shareholders: HCC, HF, DBC, SADC (See separate Board paper)

St Albans Local Plan

The Planning Inspectorate Report on the St Albans Local Plan was published in August. The Report concludes "that the St Albans City and District Local Plan provides an appropriate basis for the planning of St Albans, provided that Main Modifications are made to it." We anticipate that the Local Plan will be formally adopted by the Council at its meeting on 9th September.

This is a very important milestone for HIQ and Hemel Garden Communities since it paves the way for the development of Hemel Hempstead to the east (and north when the Dacorum Local Plan is adopted possibly later this year). This will lead to major new employment opportunities and population growth of some 50,000 people over the next 25 years, making Hemel Hempstead the largest town in Hertfordshire.

Data Centres Taskforce

One of the major actions under the Hertfordshire Digital Strategy is to set up a Data Centres Taskforce. Chaired by Neil Rutledge, the inaugural meeting of the Taskforce was in July with the purpose of maximising the opportunities presented by the development and operation of data centres in terms of skills development, employment opportunities, enterprise & innovation and wider social value and sustainability opportunities such



as waste heat supply and heat management. The Taskforce also aims to minimise the negative impact of data centres.
The Taskforce has four workstreams: Heat Networks (two pilots have been identified), Skills (negotiations are underway with a hyperscale developer), LPA Technical Support (a design guide and toolkit is about to be commissioned), Supply Chains (will be developed shortly).
We have also developed a database of data centres in/near the county, database of consultants with expertise in DCs, and will shortly be developing a communications plan. The Taskforce meets again in October.

Digital Twin Bid
We are supporting HCC Highways and Jacobs in their proposal to DfT for funding under the Integrated Digital Twin Fund. This is a next generation on from the Living Lab testbed project that the LEP funded some five years ago.There is an ambition from DfT over the next 10 years for national use of digital twins to make transport systems: safer, more efficient and more resilient. Digital twins aim to reduce congestion, improve journey reliability, provide better management of planned works, and offer a more effective response to incidents and crises. We are advising on the potential economic benefits of the programme, for instance the potential for improved productivity by reducing time delays caused by congestion.

UK Real Estate Infrastructure and Investment Forum (UKREiiF)

UKREiiF 2026 provided Invest Hertfordshire with a valuable platform to promote the county's investment proposition, strengthen strategic relationships and engage with investors, developers, government stakeholders and delivery partners. The event also enabled proactive engagement with the market during Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), reinforcing confidence that Hertfordshire remains a stable, ambitious and investment-ready location, with growth and investment activity continuing throughout the transition.

UKREiiF 2027 will take place at a pivotal moment for Hertfordshire. By this stage, the new shadow unitary authorities will be in place and there will be less than 12 months before the existing authorities are dissolved. It is therefore more important than ever that Hertfordshire continues to demonstrate that it can operate as a coherent economic geography, capable of delivering growth at scale and providing certainty for investors during a period of significant change. Core messaging will be: *One Hertfordshire: Ready for Growth, Stable through Transition.*