

Hertfordshire Futures Debates: Get Hertfordshire Working



Chaired by Matt Deegan,
radio and podcast host



Get Hertfordshire Working: watch the recording

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Adrian Hawkins, OBE, Chair Hertfordshire Futures:

Welcome to the first in a series of Hertfordshire Futures Debates where we will be taking a closer look at the three key themes that are underpinning Hertfordshire's new Economic Strategy. These are inclusion, sustainability and digital and artificial intelligence.

In other words, how can we collectively develop growth better? Future proof our economy and ensure our people, businesses and our places are not left behind.

Today we're examining the growing issue of economic inactivity and the impact that this is having on our local economy. In Hertfordshire, the rate of those who are economically inactive due to long-term sickness is growing faster than the UK average. During this session, we will try to understand some of the reasons why and we hope to identify actions to help reduce worklessness in our society.

For those watching this live, there is the opportunity to post comments in the chat.

This session will be recorded and made available to view on demand.

It now gives me great pleasure to hand you over to our presenter, Matt Deegan, who will introduce the panellists. I will be back at the end of the discussion as we set out our sights for the next steps. Thank you.

Matt Deegan, Radio and Podcast Host:

Thanks Adrian.

So welcome to Get Hertfordshire Working. My name is Matt Deegan. I think everyone here and those watching online know that the world of work is changing.

Whether that's what's happening post COVID the general changing nature of business, or even a change of government, we all have to look at what we do and how we do it. And if we look at statistics, well, unemployment is at a low level and the number of workless households has dropped. But in work, poverty has grown, as has low paid employment. However, a lower percentage of the population are working. So, it's something that's particularly driven by long term sickness, both for the young and old. Nationally, the numbers of 16 to 24's who aren't in education, employment or training has increased. And here in the county, depending on where you live, young people on Universal Credit ranges from 6 to 15%.

Available roles also changing, the number of jobs advertised in the county was down nearly 30% in 2024 from 220,000 to 160,000, and predictions about future jobs show that roles for people with degrees are likely to increase, whilst those with GCSEs are likely to decline, but what can we do about it? The UK Government's issued a white paper, get Britain working and it's called for local responses and solutions to these challenges.

So, what can we all do? Well, we've got a brilliant selection of people to help start that conversation today. Councillor Richard Roberts is leader of Hertfordshire County Council. Sarah Perman, Director of

Public Health at Hertfordshire County Council. Michael Wood, Head of Health Economic Partnerships at the NHS Confederation. They're an organisation that brings together all elements of the healthcare system. Tilini Sharland, Service Leader for Beds and Herts District at the Department for Work and Pensions, and Claire Dicks UK Lead Entity and Head of Local Community Engagement at the defence company MBDA. So, lots of things to cover today.

Michael, perhaps I can start with you. The health challenges seem quite significant. What's the scale of the problem?

Michael Wood, Head of Health Economic Partnerships at the NHS Confederation:

Yeah. Thanks, Matt and great to be here today talking about this issue and to hear from Adrian that this is the first issue you've chosen in the series. Actually, I think that shows the significance, doesn't it? And looking forward to going into some of the local insights, but I think it's just worth taking that step back and just thinking about the national context. And reminding us why this is such an important issue economically, politically, socially, it's a part of the government's growth mission. You know, it really is on the front pages of what we need nationally, and we've seen an awful lot of activity recently in the policy, in the funding landscape. No doubt we'll unpick some of that as we go through, I think three key points for me, Matt, the first point is the UK still something of an outlier amongst OECD countries in terms of economic inactivity.

We're the only country in that group not to return to pre pandemic levels, so there's clearly something for us as a nation to unpick. And the White Paper goes into some of that detail trials exploring that 4 million people not participating in the labour market due to work limiting conditions of which 2.8 million site that long term sickness you mentioned. And I think two groups you can really focus on - one group is I guess the older cohort in a working age population. I think they often cite multi-skeletal conditions, for example, but that's something I think policymakers are often aware of that group.

What's really worrying is if a younger group who cites anxiety and mental health, that's quite a new phenomenon, particularly worrying from an economic perspective and no doubt that will come up today from the speakers.

Matt

Because it's easy to say that's a post COVID thing. Is it broader than that, though? Is it just people are more comfortable talking about that, maybe they've done previously?

Michael

It's something which I think, you know, I was in discussions with London. It's a huge issue in the capital, absolutely enormous issue and that's going to take a bit of research and a bit of partnership working I think, Matt to really uncover the reasons why, and what is our response to this? I think that's really important. We might come on to that today.

The second bit linked to that is we're seeing quite a complex policy in funding landscape, which I think shows how big the issue is. The White Paper got written and White paper came out in November, 80% employment rates, ambition, it's been many, many decades since we had anywhere near that, and the rate fluctuates to where that's you're on the country.

And I think it talks about lots of those reasons for that economic inactivity due to long term sickness of which health is key. But the skills, the local labour market, you know the local economy. Huge issues we need to try and unpick there and just on the funding bits. You know, we've seen the past, the previous governments actually, many millions of pounds into our integrated care systems for work-well services up and down the country, three more integrated care systems receive £50,000,000 each for the next financial year to tackle linked issue. We've got Trail Blazers coming down so lots of funding, lots of policy needs bringing together.

My last point, Matt, I present the NHS, that's a national organisation, but it's we see ourselves as both part of the problem and part of the solution in this issue, you know actually a waiting list. How many people on our local waiting lists which might have otherwise be productive in employment. We know we've the operational pressures are sometimes limiting that system ability to ensure we are healthy but we're the biggest employer in most local areas and I'm sure when we come on to some of those local issues, we'll talk about what we can do from an employment role too. So, I think they're the three issues for me Matt, but I hope this is ever you're not the only local economy talking about this and that's really important, isn't it, that now we start understanding what matters for Hertfordshire and how it can relate to the national policy agenda and really come together in a health, work and skills plan.

Matt

I think also sometimes people don't make that connection, do they? Between health, between work, between employment. How can how can anybody in the health system think about what they're doing and how can they contribute to encouraging people to think about work?

Michael

It's really interesting. You're quite right. And actually so our integrated care systems, actually there was an explicit purpose now to support economic and social development, so this is quite new for the NHS. We're slowly waking up to our economic and social influence and agency and realising it's not just necessarily about our services, but actually how we contribute to the wider health of the population, because that of course is what we're here to do and that's what will actually help us as a service be sustainable and 80% of what keeps us healthy lies outside our clinical control. So, lots of your colleagues locally in the NHS, we're thinking who they can work with, what they can do to try and make people productive. And it's not just our services.

Matt

Richard Roberts, Leader of Hertfordshire County Council. I guess it's easy to be negative. We're talking about problems and tackling problems. I mean, Hertfordshire is doing better than actually quite a few other counties.

Cllr Richard Roberts, Leader of Hertfordshire County Council

It's really interesting. Just north of London and we're just South of the we've rediscovered the Ox-Cam arc. We're going to now, you know, we're back on to the Ox-Cam arc again, but in the middle is Hertfordshire, the Hertfordshire economy, £46 billion GVA is one of the biggest components of our national economy. We contribute a net of about £40 billion to the exchequer. It keeps the country going, so if we catch a cold here, we get a sniffle here in Hertfordshire, the country will catch a cold and we don't want that to happen. But the last seven months have been difficult because we've had quite a

negative sentiment. Consumer confidence has been knocked, business confidence has been knocked, investment has been knocked back.

The budget with its National Insurance increases. And it's tripling against inflation of the minimum wage, have added cost to business. It is great that we've got a good public sector and they're they employ lots of people. But if the public sector does not want to be the biggest employer, that needs to be business. And Hertfordshire is, is and has been going really well. We talked about that 80% aspiration for the last 10 years. Hertfordshire has been at 82% employment. That is, that is that if the rest of the country was at that level. We would be the leading economy in the world, so that's the aspiration for the rest of the country to catch up with where Hertfordshire is but buried in those figures is as you're absolutely right to refer to, is that unease, that of those who are not economically active.

There is a component that has doubled in the last few years, which are those who are claiming ill-health. And for and, there's a lot of younger people now. It's not just those retiring early, it's younger people, if you like, not engaging with and not entering the workplace and in a place like Hertfordshire, where employment's actually tight, we need everyone to be getting into employment as soon as they are ready to do so. And that's why this economic strategy is so important because we need to encourage everybody to be that contributing worker of the future.

Matt

I think it's interesting what you say there, there's a bit of motivation for younger people as well. Do they see the opportunities we've seen? There's less jobs being advertised in the area. There's high cost of living. If you're in Hertfordshire too. I mean, it's quite a challenge for a young person as they come out of a difficult educational time with COVID and engage with the world of work. Are we doing enough to think about those people?

Richard

And that's why we've got to be so careful that we don't end up with a lost generation. We cannot accept that young people are not coming forward into the workforce, so that's why we've hung on to our Youth Services here at the County Council. That's why the work with Hertfordshire Futures, the previous previously called the Local Enterprise Partnership and working with Job Centre Plus and all the other organisation, particularly our FE colleges and higher education through the university, all of that needs to come together collectively. The public sector leaning into business to make sure that those younger cohort which is tentative or struggling or mentally challenged a little bit by what they've gone through post COVID if they and just almost getting out of the bedroom, I think that's really important that we collectively pull together on that.

Matt

So, what should a Local Get Britain Working Plan for Hertfordshire look like?

Richard

It's got to be reaching out to our young people. It's got to make sure that the agencies we currently have Step2Skills is a really good example. The agencies that we've got that they're working as closely together as you possibly can. That we are collectively communicating with to understand the needs of our business community. There's nearly 70,000 businesses out there and although the number of jobs advertised has reduced, it's still demanding of more people. And if we're going to build more houses, we

need more construction workers. Now, I heard recently that the number of those doing plastering at FE College was really low. What we're going to need, we're going to need an awful lot of plasters, electricians, and all of the others to connect up the air source heat pumps and make build our sustainable homes for the future. So I think it is that collective effort that really gets behind this Economic Strategy and particularly focuses on those who aren't in work to get them into work.

Matt

OK, Sarah Perman, Director of Public Health at Hertfordshire County Council, the health challenges seem pretty significant. What can we do to support local employers in making them better prepared?

Sarah Perman, Director of Public Health at Hertfordshire County Council

Yeah. So as you can imagine, as director of public health and particularly interested in that link between employment and health and really concerned about the very steep increase that we've seen, particularly since the pandemic actually in the numbers of people who are long term out of work due to a number of different health conditions. So for me, I think the most important thing is to really understand the different groups within that whole category of long-term sick and the different drivers of that.

We've heard from Richard and from Michael about some of the groups in the younger people increases in depression and anxiety, the role that the pandemic played in that. But we've also got growing numbers. Interestingly, of women who are out of work due to their ill health and I don't think we really understand what's properly driving that. It will be due to a number of health conditions. We know that the main issues in Hertfordshire are cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, depression, anxiety, as we've said, but I'm also wondering what the role of the menopause is in that for older women because we're seeing big increases in the number of women in their 40s and 50s out of work. What the balance is for women, tipping them out of work because of their caring responsibilities. So then thinking about the role that employers complain supporting those particular factors is really important. And I'd also like to call out the really shocking figures that we have nationally, but also in Hertfordshire around the number of people with physical or learning disabilities who are not employment.

So around half of people with disabilities are not in work. We know that only 5% of people with learning disabilities, a small category of people who get long term support from the government for their condition are in employment. And that's really shocking. We really need to do something about those figures, given what we know about the role of employment is in supporting people's health.

The other thing I'd say is we do know a lot about what works and that's really important that we get out there and we support employers to understand. So just a couple of things to mention. We know that when people first fall out of work, it's that communication and engagement with employers that's really important, and then when people are ready to go back to work it's putting in place those adjustments, those you know, reduced hours, perhaps initially that support them. There's also something about workplace culture and policy. So making sure that there are access to, you know, good health programmes in the workplace for those employees that can support them, making sure that there are those flexible working policies for people that have got caring responsibilities as well. And then just picking up finally on the point that Michael said about the role of the NHS. I think there's a lot more that we could do to integrate support back to work into long-term conditions pathways.

And there's some really good practice to draw on in our own economy in Hertfordshire around that a lot

of work went on during the pandemic to support people with long COVID back to work through really good partnerships between Community health services and Hertfordshire Sports and Physical Activity Partnership and my team in public health. So, looking at where we got those examples that we could spread out across a range of other conditions I think would be important.

Matt

So, what have we picked up from long COVID, how can it inform our thoughts about broader challenges?

Sarah

So we saw a huge energy and ambition and commitment during the pandemic. Like there was, you know, that ability to throw things up in the air and really challenge the way that we had worked traditionally. And I think we saw that, for example, with people with long COVID and in that join up between the NHS and employers, I think we've lost a bit of that over the last couple of years to be honest. So yeah, to go back to some of that ambition and commitment and new ways of working and particularly drawing on those insights of our communities and residents and the voluntary sector. To work with them, they're often much closer, to be honest to our residents than many of us are in public and private sector organisations.

Matt

We talk there about voluntary organisations. It's not just the health service and workers or individuals, there's quite a lot of different people involved and people that we need to perhaps reach out to and make part of this process.

Sarah

Yes, absolutely. And thinking about the role of voluntary sector organisations themselves as employers. And often you know the real challenges that that sector face in terms of financial stability, often there's a very small organisation, so what bigger public sector organisations can do to support them as employers with the health of their own workers, but then thinking about the role of voluntary and community sector organisations in reaching individuals or providing services to individuals that perhaps we're not in the public sector, the best place to provide.

Matt

There's also a strong connection, isn't there, between being healthy and working. You know, if you work, it helps support your own health.

Sarah

Absolutely. It's a really import building -lock for health. But we also need to look at good work and not so good work. So you know we know that work when it's good, when it's healthy the conditions in which people are doing their work and fosters good health and productivity. But we also know that there are you know many sectors, many jobs that also foster ill health because of the types of demand or working practices that are required. So, getting that balance is really, really important.

Matt

OK, Claire Dicks, UK Lead Entity and Head of Local Community Engagement at MBDA. You're a significant employer in the region. We'll talk a bit about economic inactivity. How do you get the economically inactive to consider, I guess, reconsider work?

Claire Dicks, UK Lead Entity and Head of Local Community Engagement at MBDA

So I think it's kind of commonly known that a lot of organisations probably have difficulty attracting people in first instance, so some work was done with regard to the local skills improvement plans. To understand where that mismatch is and part of understanding how to get people into STEM was looking at particular groups. So we looked at the NEET individuals who are not educational without educational training or employment. And so we've looked particularly at that group. And normally we engage via another entity. Probably somebody in the third sector often run by charities or whatever that are actually looking at that work, working with schools and other organisations so. So that's one way that we've been looking at and that group, but we also have other initiatives such as STEM returners. So we're looking at some of the population that you've brought up already, people that may have left the workforce to look into sort of caring responsibilities.

For whatever reason, or they might have just picked a different career with that wasn't stem and bring it on how we actually bring those people back into back into the workforce as well as well as because we're obviously a defence company. We also look at supporting through the Armed Forces covenant, bringing ex-servicemen back into employment as well. So there's all sorts of initiatives that we're running that I'm sure many other organisations are doing as well, it feels quite disjointed. There's lots of different ways to actually look at what that population looks like.

Matt

What are the sort of best responses you're getting to these plans? There's lots of schemes seemingly that you guys are doing?

Claire

Absolutely. So the movement to work was very popular. Getting people rather, it's obviously the young generation back into education, showing them really what is out there. If they're able to, and some of these young people were actually have come out of education because they've got caring responsibilities and that and that kind of thing, but kind of understanding how they could still support their family through employment and the types of jobs that they could do, I think has been quite successful.

Matt

So, is that sometimes an assumption that kind of there isn't a job for me or this won't work?

Claire

Or how will wouldn't be fit in with my responsibilities, that kind of thing. We had all sorts of examples that came through that came through that initiative and I think. Seeing how it could work, understanding what the working practices are. What kind of support is on offer to our employees? I think that helped with that dialogue with it, with these individuals.

Matt

I mean, Richard, that's great insight, isn't it? For how, how potential employees are reacting to things. So what, what can we do to support businesses to maybe be more flexible with some of their thinking?

Richard

It's interesting, isn't post COVID flexibility has almost been the keyword. There's been a cultural change in how we work and how we go to work and how work is carried out. And I think business and the public, so business, public sector, privatisation, voluntary sector is working out how that is optimised so that we don't have too many people, too much of at time at home working and perhaps getting themselves bogged down in their in their own thoughts and nobody to talk to as opposed to you will come into work five days a week. There's a happy medium there somewhere, but we have to find the right, the right approach there. I think we touched on the voluntary sector as well. I think interestingly, lots of complaints coming in about the National Insurance contributions are hitting them, but they are an absolute keystone in Hertfordshire in how we deliver lots of things. We commission work with about 110 organisations all through our communities because it's that strength of Community at the end of the day we want children well educated in Hertfordshire schools as good as anywhere in the country and those children to come through and then into FE colleges. We need to at 16 to 18 is really, really low. It's like two 2 1/2 percent. So the problem lies there after it's almost once you've gone through this really strong institutional support getting into a community that needs to be supporting younger people to actually meet their aspirations, or should I say the aspirations of the country's county of opportunity.

Matt

Ah, yes. Well, we're in a position in particularly today as we're doing this. Rachel Reeves is making some statements, so growth is at the heart of the government agenda. It's difficult to push that on though, isn't it? When everybody faces some of these challenges?

Richard

That gross we have nothing. We will stagnate, we will go backwards. We've got to be, we have a really difficult business environment to be created over the last seven months, which are almost into stagflation. You create an inflationary pressure price is going up because business has got to pass on its costs and at the same time, we've got we've got consumer confidence down and business confidence, so it's a difficult one. Quite right. I hope that this time round the reset today will bring about that that that that increase in confidence because it's really, really important. If we want to hang on to those Youth Services, if we want to get those young people who've got learning disabilities or physical disability into work, and we do work with them to some very large extent, but if we want more of that, you've got to have the readies coming in to pay for it. And I think as a nation, never mind just Hertfordshire, but as a nation, we've not quite managed that. Our public expend expenditure is exceeding what our businesses are generating. So of course we've got to generate growth has absolutely got to be optimised, I mean I'm excited for Hertfordshire and we've got the biggest ATV media and film production, it's globally significant. A bioscience particularly around Stevenage, but across where is it is expanding but is a cluster of global significance. Two significant clusters just in one county and then we've got our 60,000 businesses right across from commercial headquarters all the way through to mom and pop delivering for the country. So the opportunity is huge here.

I think it's our job and there's a there is a serious challenge here. It comes back almost back to health again. We've got to ensure that our public services are not entirely swamped by the ageing population

and all those that need support, like our children's services, to leave enough space in there to support our, our, our, our Hertfordshire Futures and to support our voluntary sector and to support the make sure we've got to keep Hertfordshire moving, there's no point in providing a business opportunity if you can't get to it. So we've got to keep the roads moving. We've got to have the innovative mass rapid transport systems in place. We've got to make sure the railways work.

That's what I think. That's our key thing for us is making sure that infrastructure in education, health, keep the place moving, that those are the key factors which drive and help our economy to continue to thrive.

Matt

I mean, Claire would talk, obviously, younger workers, very important part to hit some of those targets. We know that mental health has been a key issue for those for those age groups. What have you found in business you can do to support people who are getting through mental health challenges?

Claire

Certainly, we have noticed that that population is much more affected by mental health issues. So we have a lot of support internally once you are employed with MBDA. So we've got we've got lots of new diverse networks, lots of ways to support people through occupational health initiatives and that kind of thing. So there's a lot of work going on with our existing employees, but we're also ensuring that we're looking at accessibility through the recruitment process as well and how we can support people who sort of indicate that that to us as well.

Matt

It's a little bit about communication to those kind of potential employees that if you come and join us, there are these resources that we understand it.

Claire

Absolutely the buzzword for it is your value proposition when you're looking at recruitment. And so it's really important not just to say how many days leave you get but to also highlight that you know we've implemented dynamic working. So, you do have the flexibility to work from home, but all the networks that are available to you and all the support, whether that be health or career development, that that kind of thing is actually put out there as part of our value proposition.

Matt

Do you think it's also something that's valuable to keep you competitive with?

Claire

Absolutely, yes, absolutely. That has been highlighted as really important down to the minutiae of how many days volunteering leave you might get. And what we actually do for social value purposes with regard to charities and communities, so everything is part of that value proposition.

Matt

I think sometimes some businesses worry that they've got to do a lot more perhaps, than they used to do, and that seems a big pressure. But can you sell that it's an opportunity actually?

Claire

It's certainly an opportunity to say what you're doing already. And lots of us have been doing this for a very long time. It's highlighting some of the initiatives that we might need to put more effort or have more coordination with other entities, but certainly a lot of companies are already doing this and really understanding the benefits and the outputs of actually what impact you can have on society by doing any number of these initiatives is probably the bit the bit that's missing. You know there's an understanding that we can make a difference, but there's lots of you here who know exactly how that makes a difference.

Matt

So there's things that we can do to sort about things that are sort of bottom up. But there's also things the government are doing kind of more top down. Tilini, what impact will the reforms on things like employment support kind of have on this economic in activity.

Tilini Sharland, Service Leader for Beds and Herts District at the Department for Work and Pensions

I think what we're all really focused on is our local response and so nationally, we know in Hertfordshire we're not going to have a travel bazaar area. However, there's so much we can do locally and having a really robust local get written, working plan is the key for us and we know we've got pockets of positive pockets, pockets of deprivation in Hertfordshire. We also know in Hertfordshire we have young people, some of which are really willing to work and want to engage in work, and I've got 13 job centres across Beds and Herts. We've got people in our books who are working with our work coaches. We have dedicated youth work, coaches. We also have youth coaches for across the age spectrum, 50 plus and so on. And the real desire is to get every single person into work. Get them closer to work, into work and with regards to barriers actually with every single person matters. In Hertfordshire, every single person matters, so whatever barrier they're facing collectively, we can work through and with them. And that's really what I'm passionate about. And there are barriers, even if it's barriers about worries about childcare, you know, that's a real concern. But actually, you know, we can support with up front childcare costs. We can, we can. There are things we can do in terms of local plans, things we can do in terms of our provision support.

We also already work with the National Career Service in Hertfordshire. So I'm very looped in to kind of the senior and junior at every level what we're doing to make sure CV's, interview skills, all of these key skills are provided for those that you know that we're working with. We've also in Hertfordshire, been doing some additional work coach time for our health customers and the learning from that really want to feed into our plans as we go forward, connect to work another really exciting opportunity for us, with regards to those with disabilities, those have complex barriers and it and it really is about how do we get everybody in to work. And that work has to be sustainable. It's got to be that balance that people, particularly youth and young people, want now. And I think, you know, I've been in six central government departments, so I've got quite a unique perspective and the success to all of this is our join up. I mean, I've just recently left the Department for Education.

But I've had my pandemic experience, you know, with youth and seeing the mental health and the youth journey. So there I'm just really passionate that this isn't, this is not doom and gloom for Hertfordshire. This is actually a really good thing for Hertfordshire, for us to do and I think finally I was just going to say that although we're above the 80% in terms of the employment rates over the last 10 years, actually like we've got to be really ambitious. For Hertfordshire, really ambitious.

Matt

What does that look like? What does big ambitious look like?

Tilini

Well, I think it's kind of saying, actually, like, I know the government want to get 80% employment rates across the country. And that's a great ambition for us. It might look a little bit different maybe let's be even more ambitious than that because it isn't really about a number for us. It's about every single individual, every single young person in Hertfordshire really having that direction, being part of our community in a positive way. And work is a big part of that.

Matt

What have we got here in Hertfordshire? That's maybe different to other areas.

Tilini

And well, we've already talked about the great opportunities in Hertfordshire around film, around sciences. We've also got great learning facilities for building skills in Hertfordshire. Have we not? You know, I'm really pleased to be able to live and work in Hertfordshire and there are so many young people who need our support in Hertfordshire. We've got we're really uniquely placed to deliver this local plan. So I think it's time to get really excited about it. But I also think that join up. And I think our challenge is there's lots of good things happening. We're working with a lot of employers who, you know, some of which are disability confident, some of which are inclusive. But actually, if we're really honest, some there are more employees out there that I would welcome working with us in job Centre path, working with us more closely and seeing our pipeline of customers as potential employees. I think there's a lot more to be done if we're really honest about the fact that do we have enough employees in Hertfordshire really dedicated and drive our mission with us.

Matt

What are you hearing from your potential job seekers? What? What do they? Obviously, they'd like jobs. They'd like to work. But what are the things that will sort of activate them and stop them being inactive?

Tilini

Well, for the we talked about youth as a real key priority I think the as the White Paper talked about sports, leisure, that kind of media, digital, all of that is real interest. So perhaps something in our plans around that. We're also hearing and it will take no one as it will just won't take you by surprise. But those young people with special educational needs and disabilities, actually we're hearing that, and the data tells us that that is a real barrier as well. So, we're hearing that. But what are we doing collectively?

You know, I think challenging ourselves to say there's a desire to work, but how do we actually make get them the right opportunities and matching the right roles to the right individuals? And it has to be quality of that. I think a lot of young people are interested in work that they and employees that are, you know that engage their interest and that early engagement is very, very important for our young people. And it needs to be, you know. Ideally. Local jobs for local people really, and that is what we're hearing a lot of a lot of our customers also don't drive, you know, so our public transport system is really, really, really important to them and us to get them into work.

Matt

Claire, when you hear that? Does that chime with what you're hearing from represent?

Claire

It does. Local people for local jobs is quite an interesting point. Certainly I think analysis that has been done with the work that we've do with the local authority and with Hertfordshire Futures, we've seen that there's a there is a definite gap between what the salary levels that people locally achieve based on what other people might achieve that have come in from outside of the area. That's been looked at. We I don't think anybody's really put their finger on what causes it. You could surmise that it's probably because and in in my area it's probably because people aren't choosing STEM careers locally.

So maybe there's a disconnect with education. You don't necessarily automatically do engineering at school. And then what is the route to go into engineering if you leave school without the relevant qualifications or you haven't got aspirations to actually get a degree in a science subject? So there's, there's that element, really. And I've been looking at that in some work that I've been doing about looking at whether we can create a Level 2 apprenticeship scheme and I think what we what we'd need because a number of other companies have done similar activities that have failed and that's normally because we don't have economies of scale and actually we need a way of facilitating bringing people in the same industry together to look at whether that's something that we could do together and pool our resources, whether that be the levy or other kinds of things. So there's all sorts of initiatives of that area if you're relying on companies or industry to do it.

I'm quite sure that you all have a role in actually helping facilitate those conversations and bring them together.

Matt

Richard, How do we bring together industry to tackle some of those challenges?

Richard

I think I reflect back a little bit on it. We're here in Stevenage, home of nationally significant business of Airbus, MBDA and others GSK, just down just down the road. They're not everywhere, they're here. They are going to attract the brightest individuals qualified to the nth degree to come and work in those industries to deliver the satellite, to deliver the drugs, to deliver effectively that technological future that that we demand and it's happening here. At the same time, I I'm really pleased with North Herts College. For example, there are now specialists training Centres which will enable local people to tap into those globally significant businesses to be able to get employment with them, and those businesses seek those individuals. So I think that's the kind of marriage in heaven that we need that we need more of. And I think that is the that's the that's the sort of link up. For example, in the NHS again, I believe in North Herts Circle there is a mock ward in in the college. So if you are training, you might as well be in the hospital. You're not. That's fantastic. That's brilliant. And the four, the four key cards? I wish I wasn't just talking about Stevenage, but the four key colleges across the across the county have all got the specialism. Oakland's have got amazing. A specialist nationally significant specialist sports training, but they've got catering as well. And then they've got all the other things absolutely going gangbusters. I shouldn't leave out, West Herts. I certainly wouldn't want to leave out the North Herts Regional colleges.

And the University and the university is again I was talking with the Vice Chancellor's senior team recently and talking about we're doing all we can to keep some of those graduates in Hertfordshire so that they don't, don't they don't leave because if there's one thing business is going to need and there's the one of the biggest challenges is that we're not having quite as many children as we were. And we're an ageing population. So if we want to keep our ambition say we want to get 85%, that's quite high, isn't it? Say we want to get 85%, we have to capture the essence of every city. You have to drive that, that, that enthusiasm of every single person, a young person, into, into employment. And so that's that, that this is this is live, this is real. And we're going to have to work even harder together.

Matt

I mean, Michael, it's an interesting point there about changes in in the population. And, you know, less of us being born. People working longer. How do those changes affect the sort of decisions we're going to have to make?

Michael

Well, what's interesting? I think amongst us on the panel and people watching, we've probably all written health strategies. We've all written work strategies, we've all written skill strategies, but the very reason we're here is we need to intertwine all these issues now. And actually the pot, you know, and that will involve understanding different, you know. Reaching in different sectors, understanding what drives them, what the implications are, understanding what Hertfordshire to and other places want. But all these issues are intertwined. Matt aren't they? And as Richard just described there. So that's what I think is going to be different about this discussion to perhaps where we were a few years ago. We're going to start getting under the bonnet and finding out some root causes of issues which previously were not within our sphere of influence, or even perhaps interest. But we're now being driven to discuss these as a collective, I think.

Matt

Sarah, how do we how do we bring these things together?

Sarah

It is about bringing things together. We've talked about the opportunities around integration. And the importance of work skills and health join up. But I think there is also something about those standalone strategies as well. I mean, you know what is driving those long-term sickness rates. You know, we know, for example, that a big cause of older people being unwell, having chronic conditions is hypertension.

Vast numbers of people don't know that they're walking around with high blood pressure. Vast numbers of people know that they've got high blood pressure but are not being properly managed, so there are some basic things that we can do within our services and within our organisations to focus on, on good health and thinking also about, you know, the drivers of that ill health, what are the root causes of it? So you know the environments in which people live, the fact that it's very difficult for people, many people in our communities to access healthy. Affordable food and that fuels obesity and that, you know, fuels people not feeling that they can be physically active.

That leads to high blood pressure, so there is something a bit for me about not forgetting those building

blocks of health, which are the basics as well as of course focusing on the relationship building and the integration between our strategies.

Matt

Are we putting the money in the right places for all those things?

Sarah

Yeah. But it'd be nice to have a bit more of it, particularly for public health and prevention. I mean that that's always the area which. It's the. It's the poor relation of other sectors. I mean, you know, I sit here not knowing what my public health grant is going to be on the 1st of April. And it's really, really important that we invest in those preventative services. It's those upstream interventions that are going to, you know, stop that tsunami of people who are out of work due to ill health.

Matt

I mean talking about sports and the impact that mental health has on mental health, having access to activities to put you in a better frame of mind.

Sarah

Yeah. And I have to say here in Hertfordshire we are really blessed. We've got a really important umbrella organisation, the Heart Sports and Physical Activity Partnership. We all know them. We all work very closely with them as small outfits, huge work that they are doing to join up different sectors and to really make sure that there are, you know, targeted, accessible opportunities for individuals and communities to access physical activity across the county.

Matt

Michael, is there anything we should be looking to other places and any ideas that we should steal or any successes that are there elsewhere.

Michael

I'm sure there's some fantastic local practice. I was talking to a chief executive of a local mental health trust actually who was not only seeing her trusts or as an employer as a good employer with people with learning disabilities or other diversity. But actually is going out speaking to local employers in the vicinity about what they can do to destigmatise this and just broaden people's horizons. I'm struck by Richard's point about where Hertfordshire sits and actually you are directly affected by and will affect London's growth plan and the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. So it's not just about what you do within your county boundaries. Is it about understanding the links either side? And part of while this will be a local plan, that connectivity, international agendas and actually into point half and say we're here, we want to learn, we've got actually a rate which is stretch which is raising the national average.

Actually we want to go beyond that actually. What can you learn with other with other places? I think so it's a local strategy, but it's not disconnected from what's happening above and across within partners. I think, Matt.

Matt

Well, we've talked a bit about having a whole system approach. I mean people aren't really sure what is a whole system approach, what does it mean?

Tilini

I think I think to me it is about standing back and looking at the challenges and opportunities across the piece together with various like organisations that isn't just solely looking at it from one perspective and working together with our local ANC organisations, large organisations, people that have an influence, organisations that can have an influence across Hertfordshire, and it's about all of us coming together on based on one plan that is for Hertfordshire.

Matt

So, who do we have to engage to do a whole systems approach?

Richard

I think it's really interesting because this lands right in the middle of the government's agenda to have mayors across the whole country and actually that devolution, which was talked about with the previous government, has been picked up by this government as well, that the evolution where there is leadership, not just of local government but of the public sector, but more, more importantly, of place.

Now that place for that to have the biggest impact I think is probably over a broader area and Hertfordshire's a very big county in its own right, put a mayor on top, but you could equally we've talked about Cambridgeshire, haven't we, we've talked about we don't go there, we don't talked about Cambridgeshire, but we've Buckinghamshire is another neighbour, another one is Essex. So that those are neighbours so in optimising the totality of what we do. Because we do in total spend something like just for Hertfordshire is about £7 billion in the public sector, right across health and education and local government and all sorts of things. Including your areas. That actually joining that up and optimising that has got that is that that is the systemic approach and if government genuinely engages with that with that mayoral leadership you are in. You are adding some value over and above what's already a very positive landscape.

Matt

Sarah who, who should be adding to our whole system?

Sarah

I'm speaking to employees themselves and those who are out of work due to their illness. I still think there's a lot we don't understand about the barriers to people getting back into work.

So I think we need to, you know, really get underneath the headlines, get out there and you know, talk to residents, talk to people that have been out of work for months and find out what's stopping them and also find out why some of them don't want to go back to work because not all of them do.

So what is it about the nature of the workplace that can be changed to make it more attractive that then aligns with those, you know, individuals own aspirations for employment?

Matt

Do you think the organisation sort of within public health, it geared up to be able to absorb that information and sort of synthesise it?

Sarah

Yeah. Yeah, very much so. I mean, we do a lot of data analysis. You know huge data sets that we analyse, we get them from, you know, different partners across the system. There's much more that we can do in terms of getting that oversight of what the intelligence is telling us, but, you know, working with other organisations who've also got their own, you know, surveys, data insights into what people are telling them.

Matt

Yeah, Michael. Big approach? Yeah. Who've got to engage with? I

Michael

I was just thinking of something about the top down the bottom up in the lateral drivers here. And I was sometimes we write strategy with the best intentions. It's disconnected to, you know, the communities on the ground. We've heard about what communities want. They may not. We may not. We may not be engaging. SMEs have heard about those local line because so we need to understand and connect to the ground. But we've heard about that policy in that funding landscape, which is quite, you know, very stretched and a lot happening. So we need a voice from that strategy up to Westminster. So there's a top down and bottom up and then the lateral drivers are who is who has a say in that strategy, who has a say in this issue and who can bring part of the policy and the funding agenda together. And so that strategy weaving together that. But again, with the single voice up to Westminster and that connection into communities and to where actually change and employers happen and work is really important.

Matt

Claire for your company to be successful. Who would like to work with more?

Claire

So the single voice that's come out of a number of the comments is quite important. One plan, but with lots of sub plans if that makes sense. Whether that's particular industries that have particular skills strategies. The joined up approach is critical to be one voice back into government to fill those gaps wherever they are, whether it be funding or whatever. All of us are engaging with government for all sorts of different reasons, but we you know, if you really want to make a difference in Hertfordshire, you've got to bring all of that together and be one voice.

Matt

You're pretty engaged in this market for businesses that aren't engaged, what are the first steps for them to think about this more broadly?

Claire

So we've talked about smaller companies. We're looking at our supply chain, for example. And I don't know if everybody's doing that, but I suppose really this central. This central plan, whoever owns that central plan, possibly Hertfordshire Futures. Whoever owns it, you know, has to sort of also engage with look at the collaboration with the smaller companies, look at the collaboration that could happen. We've often talked about can we collaborate with our apprenticeship schemes? Not necessarily that got off the ground. Everyone does their own thing.

There must be ways to bring smaller companies that don't have that ability to do something on their

own. How they can collaborate with larger companies and that could be connected to a skills strategy for a particular sector that sort of sits underneath the overarching skills strategy.

Matt

Tilini - when you think about job centres and companies that really engage, what's a good working relationship?

Tilini

I think for us a good working relationship is one where really we can work together to get the right jobs for the right customers and those jobs are of good quality and sustainable. It makes a huge difference, not just that particular person, but they might be from a family where there's been generations of, you know, no work. And so that's going to impact it. Those around them in a massive way. So, what we're doing is effectively changing people's lives. So, partnering with an employer that understands the social value of what we're trying to do and we're doing together is really, really important. And also, you know, partners that are and I'd call them partners because I definitely want to partner with them to actually recognise actually sometimes. You know you have to be really bold about your selection of candidate, you know, and what is the training that they might need to undertake? What are the opportunities? What but everyone can bring something to the table and it is about being really broad about the right people for the right jobs, but a good relationship is one where it actually leads to really good, successful outcomes for the individual, for our plan and for Hertfordshire. So it's employees that will be willing to work closely with us even more closely. And you know, come to us, a lot of them, a lot of employees across Hertfordshire are paying for like HR Services. You know, we offer this free service. So you know, just a big plug to work even more with us, I would say.

Matt

And Sarah, business and health, how can how can they work closer together business and health?

Sarah

Well, I think that, I mean we've been saying there is a, there is a lot already and some important government schemes. So you know thinking about for example we talked about young people and depression anxiety, you know, we now have employment in advisors within talking therapies. That's the main support for people that they access through primary care, so that that's really important. I think embedding health support, whether it's for physical or mental health conditions.

Within work programmes and the other way round is really, really important and then, as I said at the beginning, you know, making sure that employers have access to the best possible advice around their own policies and also what they may do to enable their workforce to access support in the workplace. So you know, for example. There are lots of employers across Hertfordshire and my team is involved with this who offer health checks to their staff or offer support for smoking cessation or for weight management so you know we can support with that particularly for the smaller and medium sized enterprises who may not have the big budgets to afford that.

Matt

Thinking about a local getting Britain working plan here in Hertfordshire. Richard. What? What? What do you want to tell businesses? How do you want to get them involved?

Richard

I think Hertfordshire Futures is a great mechanism for hearing the voice of business, and I think the independence of the Business Board is just excellent. I was sat here reflecting on this conversation and one of my favourite words is 'empowering' and I think so much what we're talking about is about having empowering support agency so that all can thrive and then that thriving moves into employment, so whether that's so, for example, there are others, but Wenta, for example, is business support offering something to, again, that helping businesses to do more, the sports organisation helping more to volunteer and contribute into sport and to be into sport or something as simple as health walks. You know, we support the leadership, the volunteer leaders that's like 40 or 1000 people went on health walks. Have we got something dedicated for young people? So that they start to socialise and so that that empowerment throughout all of we've talked about. So that we're again that, that, that work we're optimising that opportunity and that's where I think that's where I think we go we just we just bring that energy through all that we do and bring it together and then we will then to your point we really will go the extra two or three percent yeah, we'll keep driving that GVA.

Matt

OK well that's all the time that we have let me thank Richard Roberts, Sarah Perman, Claire Dicks, Michael Wood and Tilini Sharland. I think Adrian, it's back to you.

Adrian

I would like to extend our huge thanks to our expert panellists and our presenter, Matt, for what was a really stimulating 60 minutes of discussion, thank you very much indeed and there's a lot of things that have come out of that conversation which are wonderful.

These conversations are vital as we develop a new Economic Strategy for the county and help to shape an effective work health and skills offer for local people. As we've heard today, this needs to be a whole systems approach to Get Hertfordshire Working. Some key points to consider in greater detail are changing general knowledge and the thought process regarding apprenticeships and their qualifications following amendments by the last government. Today, every student can apply for level one and two apprenticeships, which will help them to evolve to higher levels and a rewarding career, keeping active and involved in society truly helps one's mental health and whilst benefit systems are available, there is nothing more fulfilling than employment and the opportunity to develop a rewarding career.

Now, thanks to our viewers, and please do join us again on the 24th of February when we will discuss how we can help shape a greener economy.

Thank you.