

Hertfordshire Growth Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, 22 January 2025



Hertfordshire
Growth Board

Minutes

To: All Members of the Hertfordshire Growth Board
From: Legal, Democratic & Statutory Services, Hertfordshire County Council
Ask for: Stephanie Tarrant
Tel: 01992 555481

Date: Wednesday, 22 January 2025

Attendance

Council Leaders (11 Voting Members)

M. Mills-Bishop, Broxbourne Borough Council
A. England, Dacorum Borough Council
B. Crystall, East Herts District Council
S. Wortley (*substituted for R. Roberts*), Hertfordshire County Council
J. Newmark, Hertsmere Borough Council (Chair)
D. Allen, North Hertfordshire District Council
P. de Kort, St Albans City and District Council
R. Henry, Stevenage Borough Council (Vice-Chair)
S. Giles-Medhurst, Three Rivers District Council
P. Taylor (Mayor), Watford Borough Council (Vice-Chair)
M. Holloway, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

Co-opted Members (4)

P. Burstow, Hertfordshire and West Essex ICS, NHS
A. Hawkins, Herts Futures
J. Krause, Homes England
W. Wills, University of Hertfordshire

The full Board Meeting can be viewed here: [Hertfordshire Growth Board - 22 January 2025](#).

1. Minutes

- 1.1 The Minutes of the Board meeting held on 17 July 2024 (Part I) were confirmed as a correct record.

2. Public Questions – Standing order 12

- 2.1 There were no Public Questions.

3. Public Petitions – Standing Order 13

- 3.1 There were no Public Petitions.

4. Spotlight on Hertsmere Borough Council's Growth Ambitions and Priorities

[Officer Contact: Cllr Jeremy Newmark, Leader Hertsmere Borough Council Sajida Bijle, Chief Executive Hertsmere Borough Council]

- 4.1 The Board received a presentation from Hertsmere Borough Council on its growth ambitions and priorities. The presentation can be viewed here: [Presentation - Hertsmere Borough Council's Growth Ambitions and Priorities](#).
- 4.2 Members heard that Hertsmere Borough Council was celebrating its 50th anniversary, noting its position on the edge of Hertfordshire and London. The district included Bushey, Borehamwood, Radlett, and Potters Bar, with a population of around 110,000. Notably, 36.9% were from ethnic minorities. Challenges for the borough included a median pay of just over £27,000 and average house prices close to £500,000, making housing affordability difficult. Hertsmere ranked 2224 out of 3177 in terms of deprivation, with 20% of adults reporting to be physically inactive. Hertsmere benefitted from excellent rail and road connections to London, including King's Cross, St Pancras, the M25, and the A414. It was noted that nearly 80% of the borough was within the green belt.
- 4.3 Hertsmere was a hub for creative industries, hosting major studios like Elstree and Sky Studios. The area was focused on sustainable development, aiming to deliver 9,400 homes by 2040, with an emphasis on affordable housing. Economic growth was supported through local business initiatives and a creative strategy. Environmental goals included reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing biodiversity. Hertsmere was home to international

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businesses such as Leonardo Helicopters, Fujitsu, and the BBC, which contributed to its innovative and resilient economy.

- 4.4 Hertsmere was progressing with its new local plan by engaging in stakeholder discussions, which included the County Council and infrastructure providers. Major developments, including a significant data centre proposal, were in progress. The council had updated its community safety plan and developed a new physical activity and well-being strategy. Affordable housing schemes were being progressed, with the Clarendon Road scheme completed last year. Engagement with local businesses continued, highlighted by the 'Our Generation Hertsmere scheme', which connected students with businesses. The local plan sought to reduce Green Belt allocation by 40% and deliver around 9,400 homes, with a focus on town centre regeneration and brownfield site development to preserve green spaces.
- 4.5 Hertsmere was continuing to invest in Elstree Studios and developing a screen tourism offer. Feasibility studies were being conducted for a film and TV heritage centre in Borehamwood. Environmental efforts across the borough had included park improvements, investment in electric vehicle charging, and a commitment to achieve net zero carbon by 2050. The outlook focused on balancing growth with environmental protection and sustainable development.
- 4.6 This item can be viewed here at 00:09:03 [Item 4 - Hertsmere Borough Council's Growth Ambitions and Priorities](#).

RESOLVED

- 4.7 The Growth Board noted the information shared within the presentation.
- 5. 'Right Homes, Right Places' Housing Mission Deep Dive**
[Officer Contact: Cllr Paul de Kort, Leader St Albans City and District Council, Claire Hamilton, Chief Executive St Albans City and District Council, Colin Haigh, Director of Growth and Place, Hertfordshire County Council]
- 5.1 The Board received a report which provided a deep dive into progress to date and the proposed approach to contribute to the delivery of the Right Homes, Right Places housing mission for Hertfordshire.

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- 5.2 Members heard from Homes England about the role of the agency in the context of the “Right Homes, Right Places” initiative. It was noted that a new chief executive, Eamonn Boylan, from Greater Manchester Combined Authority, had joined the agency and the focus was on following direction from the new government and using all available tools to achieve housing growth, including a target of 1.5 million homes during this Parliament. The Board noted priorities such as delivering social housing and supporting the New Towns Task Force and New Homes Accelerator. The Devolution White Paper’s emphasis on regional focus and collaboration with mayoral strategic authorities to develop delivery pipelines was acknowledged and it was noted that Homes England aimed to support local growth by aligning with local visions and needs.
- 5.3 The Growth Board had identified housing as a key mission due to its significant impact on growth. Key goals within the mission included:
- Building more social, affordable, and specialist housing to support those in need.
 - Highlighting a pipeline of development sites to expedite projects.
 - Ensuring homes were well-designed and sustainable to create healthy, safe places.
 - Preparing joint strategic plans for long-term growth and infrastructure.
- 5.4 The Board considered the level of ambition and discussed additional actions to advance the housing agenda.
- 5.5 Members noted that the housing delivery test figure for Watford was incorrectly reported as 12%, with the correct figure being 97%. It was noted that the dominance of a few large developers was a fundamental cause of the housing crisis across Hertfordshire and the UK and acknowledged a need to support smaller and medium-sized developers to increase competition. Officers noted that this could be achieved by ensuring a mix of sites for development were allocated, with smaller sites attracting smaller developers.
- 5.6 In response to a Member question regarding why only three developers had signed up to the Quality Charter, officers advised that on speaking to developers, they had expressed a desire for concessions within the planning system on signup. Developers wanted guarantees for fast-tracked determinations of their applications or assurances that their applications would be decided by officers. Officers advised that other methods of holding developers

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to account would be reviewed, including updating building regulations.

- 5.7 The Board heard that the Housing First policy had been successful in Watford and other districts and acknowledged a need to discuss future plans for this policy, given its success. Officers from the County Council were not familiar with the policy and agreed to review the policy with district/borough colleagues.
- 5.8 The Board considered that many residents would be happier with new developments if infrastructure, such as health centres and schools, were guaranteed to be in place alongside new housing developments. Members highlighted examples where promised infrastructure had not been built, leading to frustration. It was noted that any plans to fast-track planning applications should require detailed plans upfront, rather than outline applications, to ensure what is proposed is delivered. This would provide more assurance to residents and prevent changes after initial approval.
- 5.9 Members commented on affordable house and noted that even with a 20% reduction in housing costs, it would not come close to tackling the housing problem. Ongoing work with social housing and Homes England was required.
- 5.10 This item can be viewed here at 00:21:00 [Item 5 - 'Right Homes, Right Places' Housing Mission Deep Dive](#).

Colin Haigh

RESOLVED

- 5.11 The Growth Board supported the proposed next steps for the Topic Expert Group as set out in Section 8 of the report.

6. Healthy and Safe Places For All Mission Deep Dive

[Officer Contact: Paul Burstow, Chair of the Mission and Chair of Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB and Ben Martin, Associate Director of Planning, Infrastructure and Economy, Watford Borough Council]

- 6.1 The Board reviewed a report which provided a deep dive into progress to date, and the proposed next steps to take forward the Healthy and Safe Places for All Mission work programme. The Board received a presentation on the Healthy and Safe Places For All Mission Deep Dive. The presentation can be viewed here: [Presentation - Healthy and Safe Places For All Mission Deep Dive](#).

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- 6.2 The Board acknowledged the importance of creating healthy places to mitigate potential harm from development and provide tangible benefits to residents. The mission focused on ensuring that neighbourhoods were designed to improve physical and mental health, safety, and improve social connectedness. The mission prioritised maintaining health and preventing illnesses caused by health disparities, population growth, housing pressures, transport issues, and environmental challenges like poor air quality and gaps in active travel infrastructure.
- 6.3 The mission was underpinned by five key goals which sought to improve and regenerate places, embed health and well-being principles in planning and infrastructure, address inequalities and improve collaboration to ensure health infrastructure met local needs.
- 6.4 The Board heard that the planned rebuild of Watford General Hospital was progressing positively following the Secretary of State's recent announcement. It was noted that the redevelopment would go ahead, with more detailed and encouraging information emerging. The project was now in wave two of the program and that as Watford General was well-advanced in its plans, there was the potential for the project to advance more rapidly if an earlier slot became available, however continued effort was needed to maintain progress. Members challenged this view, noting that construction had been proposed for 2034, having placed 24th in the list, despite having land and planning permission ready and the current site requiring significant investment. These comments were taken on board and the mission leads were working on a case to advance to an earlier slot if one become available.
- 6.5 The mission leads had completed a comprehensive review of data and literature to understand the current state and identify best practices globally for developing a healthy places framework. Funding had been secured to advance this workstream and engagement with stakeholders, especially elected members, was underway to refine and ensure the framework was practical and usable by local authorities. A first draft of the framework was being finalised for wider stakeholder input.
- 6.6 In response to a Member question regarding the challenges of devolution, the Board heard that the NHS were keen to support where appropriate and were watching how neighbouring authorities were progressing. It was noted that the NHS was interested in understanding how risks could be managed with a potential change in service areas.

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- 6.7 The Board commented on the opportunities to embrace AI in helping progress the mission. It was noted that AI had made significant progress recently, and whilst it was constantly evolving, the team was considering its potential benefits. The team aimed to develop a long-lasting framework that incorporated AI to aid in the development process and inform future development choices.
- 6.8 Members heard that 1,000 police officer hours per month were used supporting those requiring mental health intervention due to the NHS not having capacity within the system. This was raised for the partnership to consider future provision. It was noted that work on mental health was ongoing with a new mental health hub opening at Lister Hospital
- 6.9 The Board agreed that there was strong support for a robust formal process in the development and the adoption of the framework.
- 6.10 This item can be viewed here at 01:06:00 [Item 6 - Healthy and Safe Places For All Mission Deep Dive](#).

RESOLVED

- 6.11 The Growth Board supported the proposed next steps for the Strategic Steering Group to take forward, as set out in Section 8 of the report.

7. Hertfordshire Growth Board (HGB) – proposed draft budget for 2025/26 financial year

[Officer Contact: Matt Chatfield, Head of Strategy and Programmes, HGB]

- 7.1 The Board received a report which summarised the proposed draft budget for financial year 25/26 for consideration and approval by the Board. The budget position as of December 2024 indicated that HGB is expected to have spent £593k by the end of the financial year 2024/25, with approximately £922k available within the Herts Business Rates Retention pilot growth reserve. Future funding will need to be considered beyond 2026/27 to continue resourcing the HGB and its programmes, including pooling of funds between partners.
- 7.2 Key deliverables over the last financial year included supported Herts Futures launch the 'Invest Hertfordshire' prospectus, awarding

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contracts for high-speed internet under Project Gigabit, and funding the local area retrofit accelerator. The board also launched the development charter and worked closely with the development sector through the Hertfordshire Infrastructure Development Board. An annual report further summarising the deliverables would be presented to the Board in March 2025. The proposed budget for 2025/26 included funding rollovers and salary increases to account for inflation.

- 7.3 Members heard that to avoid staffing gaps and address future funding uncertainties, interim staffing arrangements starting 10 February 2025 were proposed. It had been decided not to backfill the Growth Board Director position immediately, allowing flexibility in response to government policy directions and the Devolution White Paper. Interim leadership was to be provided by Neil Hayes, Director for Economy and Skills at Hertfordshire County Council/Chief Executive of Hertfordshire Futures, supported by the Head of Partnerships & Advocacy. These arrangements would be revisited in Spring 2025, with the remaining Growth Board team continuing their roles and reporting to the Director for Economy and Skills.
- 7.4 The Board supported the outlined proposals and emphasised the urgency of reviewing the growth board and its funding and demonstrating cooperation to Government. The Board commented on the potential weaknesses of the Growth Board being managed by Hertfordshire Future's, however officers highlighted that there was a significant strategic opportunity to align the independent voice of businesses, with public sector leaders. The joint oversight had the potential to strengthen collaboration on the growth agenda, particularly in relation to the economic mission. It was crucial for business leaders to understand and support the growth initiatives, including housing, healthy places, and digital access.
- 7.5 Forogh Rahmani, Hertfordshire Growth Board Director was thanked by the Board for her leadership and direction.
- 7.6 This item can be viewed here at 01:40:00 [Item 7 - Proposed draft budget for 2025/26 financial year](#).

RESOLVED

- 7.6 The Growth Board:
- Approved the draft budget for 2025/26 financial as per paragraph 3.2 of the report.

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- Approved the proposal for interim arrangements being put in place to backfill the HGB Director, as per paragraph 3.4 in the report.
- Noted the current financial position, with further work to be done to consider appropriate future funding arrangements from financial year 2026/27 following review of HGB in late spring/ early summer.

8. Hertfordshire Growth Board: Advocacy, Communication and Engagement Plan

[Officer Contact: Forogh Rahmani, Hertfordshire Growth Board, Tel: 01992 588233]

- 8.1 The Board received a report which provided an update on the communications, engagement and advocacy work of the HGB.
- 8.2 Over the past year, the Board had focused on enhancing its communications and engagement strategy to raise awareness of its collective efforts and growth agenda. This included amplifying work to communities, key stakeholders, government officials, and local MPs. The Board had utilised various channels such as local press, media, and paid advertising to strengthen its reach. Significant successes included the promotion of partner initiatives with the University of Hertfordshire now represented on the Board and the effective use of LinkedIn. Moving forward, the Board planned to further engage with government and local MPs, starting with an upcoming event at Westminster.
- 8.3 This item can be viewed here at 01:51:00 [Item 8 - Advocacy, Communication and Engagement Plan](#).

RESOLVED

- 8.4 The Growth Board noted the information shared within the presentation.

9. Other Part I Business

- 9.1 None.

10. Date of next meeting

- 10.1 The date of the next meeting was noted as Wednesday 16 July 2025.

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