



Hertfordshire Futures Get Enterprising

Service Evaluation (2022 – 2026)

August 12 2026

CONTENTS

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

2. Methodology

3. Strategic Context

4. The Current Get Enterprising Service

5. Performance, Reach and Progress Since 2022

6. Business Perspectives

7. Get Enterprising within the Business Support Ecosystem

8. Geographic Reach and District Analysis

9. Alignment with the Hertfordshire Economic Strategy

10. Assessing the Current Service Model

11. Future Performance Framework

12. Conclusions

13. Recommendations

APPENDIX

A: Client survey questionnaire and Stakeholders Interviewed

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

Hertfordshire Futures commissioned Deyton Bell to undertake an independent evaluation of the Get Enterprising programme to assess its effectiveness, strategic contribution and continuing relevance within Hertfordshire's business support ecosystem. The evaluation was intended not only to review programme performance during the current contract period but also to inform future commissioning decisions and the development of enterprise support across the county.

The evaluation examined whether Get Enterprising continues to meet the needs of Hertfordshire's entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses, how effectively it complements the wider business support landscape and whether the current service model remains appropriate in the context of changing economic conditions and evolving business needs.

The evaluation drew upon a comprehensive range of evidence, including programme documentation, management information and performance data, stakeholder interviews, business surveys, district-level analysis and previous evaluation findings. Together, these sources provide a robust evidence base from which to assess both operational performance and longer-term strategic value.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

The evaluation concludes that Get Enterprising remains a successful, well-managed and strategically important intervention that continues to justify public investment.

The programme has consistently achieved strong levels of performance across the evaluation period, supporting entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses in every district and borough of Hertfordshire whilst exceeding the majority of contractual outputs and outcomes. Businesses and stakeholders alike regard the programme highly, particularly valuing the quality of personalised adviser support, the flexibility of delivery and the programme's ability to respond to changing business needs.

Perhaps most importantly, the evaluation found no evidence that the underlying need for dedicated enterprise support has reduced. On the contrary, the economic environment has become more challenging, with new businesses requiring more intensive support to establish sustainable operating models, develop digital capability and build resilience before pursuing growth.

The evaluation therefore concludes that Get Enterprising remains the right intervention, delivered through a fundamentally sound service model that continues to align closely with Hertfordshire Futures' strategic priorities. The principal challenge facing Hertfordshire Futures is not whether the programme should continue, but how future commissioning can strengthen strategic integration, improve long-term performance measurement and ensure the programme continues to evolve alongside the changing needs of Hertfordshire's business community.

GET ENTERPRISING EVALUATION REPORT 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



ABOUT THE REPORT

Hertfordshire Futures commissioned an independent evaluation of the Get Enterprising programme to assess its effectiveness, strategic contribution and continued relevance within Hertfordshire's business support ecosystem.

The evaluation draws on performance data, surveys, stakeholder interviews, district analysis and previous evaluations to provide a robust evidence base for future commissioning and the development of enterprise support across the county.

GET ENTERPRISING: IMPACT AT A GLANCE (2022-2026)



796
BUSINESSES
SUPPORTED



717
PROSPECTIVE
ENTREPRENEURS
SUPPORTED



490
NEW
BUSINESSES
CREATED



636
JOBS
CREATED



92%
CUSTOMER
SATISFACTION
RATE



The programme exceeds the majority of contractual targets, delivering strong outcomes and high levels of satisfaction across every district and borough of Hertfordshire.

FIVE OVERARCHING FINDINGS

1



CLEAR MARKET NEED

Demand for enterprise support remains strong. Businesses need personalised advice to navigate a complex economic environment and develop resilient, sustainable models.

2



STRONG PERFORMANCE

Get Enterprising exceeds most targets, supporting hundreds of entrepreneurs and businesses to start, grow and create jobs, with consistently high satisfaction.

3



HIGH QUALITY DELIVERY

Personalised adviser support, flexible delivery and the ability to tailor support to individual needs are highly valued by businesses and recognised by stakeholders.

4



VALUED ECOSYSTEM ROLE

The programme complements the Hertfordshire Growth Hub, serving different client groups with different needs. Stronger progression pathways will enhance the customer journey.

5

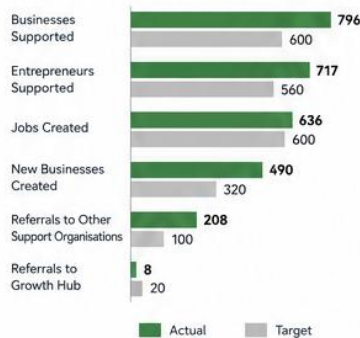


OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE COMMISSIONING

Delivery is strong. The main opportunities lie in strategic oversight, improved data, better integration and a broader framework to capture long-term impact.

EXCEEDING TARGETS

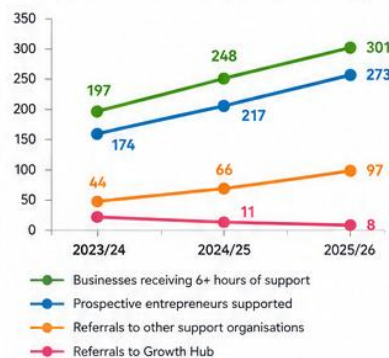
Target vs Actual Performance (2022-2026)



The programme has exceeded 5 out of 6 contractual targets, demonstrating strong delivery and value for public investment.

POSITIVE TRENDS OVER TIME

Key Performance Trends (2023/24 - 2025/26)



Demand and engagement are rising, with more businesses receiving intensive support and greater use of specialist organisations.

BROAD & COUNTY-WIDE REACH

Active in Every District and Borough



The programme supports entrepreneurs across all 10 districts and boroughs, reflecting local needs and contributing to balanced economic growth.

STRATEGIC CONCLUSIONS



Get Enterprising remains the right intervention, delivered through a sound and adaptable model that aligns with Hertfordshire Futures' strategic priorities. The need for enterprise support is stronger than ever in a challenging economy.

The challenge is not whether the programme should continue, but how to strengthen impact, integration and long-term outcomes.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS



Enhance data and performance measurement to capture longer-term business outcomes.



Strengthen integration and progression pathways within the business support ecosystem.



Increase strategic oversight and visibility of programme performance.



Adopt a broader performance framework aligned to strategic priorities.



Continue to evolve the offer to meet changing business needs and emerging opportunities.



Get Enterprising is making a significant contribution to Hertfordshire's enterprise landscape—supporting people, creating businesses, generating jobs and building a stronger local economy.



HEADLINE FINDINGS

The evaluation identified five overarching findings;

1. Get Enterprising continues to meet a clear and demonstrable market need. Demand for enterprise support remains strong across Hertfordshire, with businesses requiring increasingly personalised advice and guidance to navigate a more complex economic environment. The programme continues to provide an accessible gateway into self-employment and business development whilst supporting businesses beyond initial start-up towards sustainable trading.
2. The programme is performing well and delivering meaningful outcomes. During the evaluation period Get Enterprising exceeded the majority of contractual performance targets, supporting 796 businesses and 717 entrepreneurs, contributing to the creation of 490 new businesses and 636 jobs whilst maintaining consistently high levels of customer satisfaction. The programme has demonstrated resilience throughout changing economic conditions and has successfully adapted its offer to reflect emerging business priorities, including Artificial Intelligence, digital capability and business resilience.
3. The quality of delivery is a significant strength. Businesses consistently identified personalised adviser support as the most valuable aspect of the programme. Stakeholders similarly recognised the professionalism, flexibility and responsiveness of delivery, highlighting the programme's ability to tailor support to individual business circumstances rather than relying upon standardised interventions.
4. The programme occupies an important and distinct position within Hertfordshire's business support ecosystem. The evaluation found that Get Enterprising complements rather than duplicates the Hertfordshire Growth Hub, serving different client groups with different support requirements. Whilst stronger progression pathways between services would improve customer journeys, the evidence supports retaining a dedicated enterprise support programme as a core component of the county's wider business support offer.
5. The principal opportunities for improvement relate to commissioning rather than delivery. The evaluation identified relatively few operational weaknesses within the programme itself. Instead, opportunities exist to strengthen strategic oversight through improved management information, greater integration across Hertfordshire's business support ecosystem, enhanced commissioner visibility and a broader performance framework capable of measuring longer-term business progression and strategic impact.

STRATEGIC CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation addressed strategic questions that will directly inform forthcoming procurement.

Firstly, the evidence strongly supports the continued commissioning of a dedicated county-wide enterprise support programme. There is no evidence that demand has diminished or that the programme's fundamental purpose has become less relevant. Indeed, changing economic conditions have reinforced the importance of accessible, personalised enterprise support for aspiring entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses.

Secondly, the evaluation concludes that Hertfordshire Futures' investment creates genuine additional value. Whilst some enterprise support would undoubtedly continue through other organisations and funding streams, the evidence found no indication that a comparable county-wide programme, aligned to Hertfordshire's strategic priorities and delivered consistently across all districts and boroughs, would exist in the absence of Hertfordshire Futures' investment. Public funding therefore enables a level of consistency, accessibility and strategic coordination that would otherwise be difficult to achieve.

Thirdly, the current delivery model remains fundamentally sound. The balance between pre-start and early-stage business support continues to reflect the realities of modern business development, where businesses frequently require ongoing support beyond formal start-up. Similarly, the evaluation found no evidence to support integrating Get Enterprising entirely within the Hertfordshire Growth Hub. Instead, future success will depend upon strengthening progression between complementary services whilst retaining the distinct focus of each programme.

Finally, the evaluation concludes that the programme has evolved more rapidly than the commissioning framework used to assess it. Delivery has adapted successfully to changing business needs, incorporating greater emphasis on resilience, digital capability and Artificial Intelligence, whilst the performance framework continues to focus predominantly on traditional output measures. Future commissioning should therefore place greater emphasis on business progression, resilience, long-term impact and strategic contribution alongside established contractual outputs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROCUREMENT

The evaluation recommends that future procurement should build upon the strengths of the existing programme rather than fundamentally redesigning its purpose or delivery model. Key recommendations are to:

- Continue commissioning a dedicated county-wide enterprise support programme as a distinct component of Hertfordshire's wider business support ecosystem.
- Retain personalised adviser-led support whilst introducing greater flexibility to tailor support according to business readiness, ambition and individual needs rather than fixed stages of business development.
- Strengthen progression pathways between Get Enterprising, the Hertfordshire Growth Hub and wider specialist business support, so businesses can move more seamlessly between complementary services.
- Place greater emphasis on business resilience and sustainable development, recognising that successful enterprise support extends beyond business creation to helping businesses establish robust and commercially viable operating models.
- Improve commissioner oversight and strategic integration through enhanced management information, stronger CRM integration, clearer programme branding and improved digital integration across Hertfordshire Futures' wider business support offer.
- Adopt a broader performance framework that complements traditional output measures with indicators related to business long-term impact, progression, resilience, survival, innovation and strategic contribution.
- Commission strategic outcomes rather than prescribing delivery processes, providing sufficient flexibility for future providers to respond to changing business needs whilst maintaining clear accountability for public investment.

FINAL REFLECTION

This evaluation found relatively few operational weaknesses within Get Enterprising. The programme is delivering well, is highly regarded by businesses and stakeholders and continues to make a significant contribution to Hertfordshire's entrepreneurial economy. The principal opportunities identified relate not to the quality of delivery, but to the way in which the programme is commissioned, integrated and evaluated. Future procurement should focus on preserving the qualities that businesses consistently value—high-quality personalised advice, accessibility and flexibility—whilst strengthening strategic oversight, ecosystem integration and the measurement of long-term impact.

Ultimately, the evaluation concludes that Get Enterprising remains the right intervention for Hertfordshire. The next procurement should not seek to replace a successful programme, but to commission its next evolution, ensuring that enterprise support continues to meet the changing needs of Hertfordshire's entrepreneurs whilst supporting the county's wider economic ambitions.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

Hertfordshire is entering a significant period of economic change. Through the Economic Strategy 2026–2036, Hertfordshire Futures has set out an ambitious vision for the county to become the UK's Innovation Heartland, characterised by higher productivity, stronger innovation, greater business resilience and more inclusive economic growth. Achieving this vision will require a business support ecosystem capable of responding to changing technologies, evolving business needs and new economic opportunities.

Against this backdrop, Hertfordshire Futures commissioned an independent evaluation of the Get Enterprising programme. The central question underpinning this evaluation is:

Is Get Enterprising still the right intervention, delivered in the right way, for Hertfordshire's future needs?

The evaluation therefore goes beyond an assessment of historical performance. It considers whether the programme continues to address a genuine market need, whether it supports the right businesses, whether it is aligned with the county's emerging economic priorities and how future commissioning arrangements might maximise its contribution to Hertfordshire's long-term ambitions.

The findings are intended to inform future service design, commissioning decisions and performance frameworks, ensuring that enterprise support continues to play an effective role within Hertfordshire's wider economic development ecosystem.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO GET ENTERPRISING

Get Enterprising was established in response to a recognised gap within Hertfordshire's business support landscape. While support existed for both business start-up activity and established growth businesses, evidence suggested that businesses in the early stages of trading often faced a lack of structured support as they moved from start-up into sustainable operation and potential growth.

The programme was designed to address this gap by providing targeted support to entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses, helping them develop the skills, knowledge and confidence required to establish sustainable enterprises and, where appropriate, progress towards growth-focused support. The original programme rationale emphasised the importance of strengthening business survival, improving entrepreneurial capability and creating a clearer pathway between start-up support and the Hertfordshire Growth Hub.

Since its inception, the programme has supported a substantial number of entrepreneurs and businesses across Hertfordshire through a combination of one-to-one advice, workshops, webinars and specialist support. The programme has subsequently been delivered through a combination of core funding and UK Shared Prosperity Fund support, expanding its reach across the county.

The current evaluation provides an opportunity to assess whether the original rationale remains valid and whether the service continues to address an identifiable market need. It will also be used to help shape the specification for the re-procurement exercise for the service, scheduled for late July/August 2026.

1.3 STRATEGIC AND COMMISSIONING CONTEXT

The evaluation takes place at a pivotal moment for Hertfordshire's economy and business support landscape.

The Hertfordshire Economic Strategy 2026–2036 establishes a long-term ambition for the county to become the UK's Innovation Heartland, building on existing strengths in innovation, life sciences, advanced manufacturing, creative industries, clean growth and digital technologies.

The Strategy places innovation, inclusion and sustainability at the centre of future economic development and identifies digital adoption, artificial intelligence, commercialisation and productivity growth as key drivers of future prosperity.

At the same time, Hertfordshire Futures is considering future commissioning arrangements for enterprise support services. This provides an opportunity not only to assess programme performance, but to consider whether existing delivery models remain appropriate in a rapidly changing economic environment.

The evaluation therefore seeks to understand whether the assumptions underpinning the current Get Enterprising model remain valid. In particular, it considers whether the programme is reaching the right businesses, addressing emerging forms of demand and supporting the skills, capabilities and behaviours that will be required within Hertfordshire's future economy.

These considerations are particularly important given evidence that businesses are increasingly seeking support relating to digital adoption, artificial intelligence, online marketing and business resilience alongside more traditional start-up support.

The future relevance of Get Enterprising will therefore depend not only on its ability to support business creation, but also on its capacity to contribute to wider economic priorities over the coming decade.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

This evaluation examines the performance, relevance and future role of the Get Enterprising programme across Hertfordshire. The assessment covers both the core-funded programme and activity delivered through additional funding streams where these form part of the overall service offer.

The evaluation focuses on the period since the previous evaluation in 2022 and considers how the programme has evolved in response to changing economic conditions, business needs and policy priorities.

Particular attention is given to developments since the introduction of UK Shared Prosperity Fund-supported activity and the implications of emerging priorities set out within the Hertfordshire Economic Strategy 2026–2036.

The scope of the evaluation extends beyond an assessment of contractual performance. Whilst programme outputs and outcomes are reviewed, the primary purpose is to examine whether the current service model remains appropriate for future delivery and commissioning.

The evaluation therefore considers both operational performance and wider strategic questions relating to programme design, targeting and effectiveness.

Specifically, the evaluation examines:

- the continuing rationale for Get Enterprising and whether the market need originally identified remains valid
- the extent to which the programme is reaching and supporting its intended client groups
- the effectiveness of the current delivery model, including one-to-one support, mentoring, workshops and webinars
- business outcomes achieved through programme participation
- the experiences and perceptions of participating businesses
- the perspectives of stakeholders and delivery partners
- the programme's position within Hertfordshire's wider business support ecosystem
- referral pathways and progression routes, particularly in relation to the Hertfordshire Growth Hub
- comparative performance across Hertfordshire's districts and boroughs
- alignment with the Hertfordshire Economic Strategy 2026–2036
- the appropriateness of current performance measures and reporting arrangements
- options for future service design, performance management and procurement.

The evaluation draws upon a combination of performance data, programme documentation, stakeholder consultation, business consultation and comparative analysis. Findings are used to assess not only what has been achieved, but also how the programme may need to evolve to support Hertfordshire's future economic ambitions.

1.5 EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation is structured around five core questions that reflect both the programme specification and the strategic objectives of Hertfordshire Futures. These questions provide the framework for evidence collection, analysis and recommendations.

Question 1: Is Get Enterprising still the right intervention, delivered in the right way, for Hertfordshire's future needs?

This overarching question considers whether the original rationale for the programme remains valid and whether the current delivery model continues to address a genuine market need. It also examines whether the programme is sufficiently aligned with emerging economic priorities, changing business needs and future commissioning ambitions.

Question 2: Is Get Enterprising supporting the right businesses?

This question examines the extent to which the programme is reaching its intended client groups and whether current eligibility, targeting and engagement approaches remain appropriate. Consideration is given to the balance between supporting pre-start entrepreneurs, early-stage businesses and more established businesses seeking specialist advice or development support.

Question 3: Is the current support offer meeting business needs effectively?

This question assesses the effectiveness of the current delivery model, including one-to-one advice, mentoring, workshops and webinars. It explores the extent to which businesses value and benefit from support, whether support is appropriately tailored and whether the intensity and duration of support remain suitable.

Question 4: How effectively does Get Enterprising operate within Hertfordshire's wider business support ecosystem?

This question considers the programme's relationships with the Hertfordshire Growth Hub, local authorities and other referral partners. It examines referral pathways, progression routes and the extent to which businesses are able to access the right support at the right stage of their development.

Question 5: How should Get Enterprising evolve to maximise its contribution to Hertfordshire's future economic ambitions?

This question brings together evidence from across the evaluation to consider future service design, strategic alignment, performance measurement and commissioning arrangements. Particular attention is given to the priorities identified within the Hertfordshire Economic Strategy 2026–2036, including innovation, digital adoption, productivity, sustainability and inclusive growth.

These questions are revisited throughout the report and provide the basis for the conclusions and recommendations presented in the final chapter.

1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The remainder of this report is structured to move from context and evidence gathering through to assessment, conclusions and recommendations.

Chapters 2 to 8 focus primarily on evidence gathering and analysis.

Chapter 2: sets out the evaluation methodology, including the evidence sources used, stakeholder engagement activities and limitations of the analysis.

Chapter 3: provides the strategic context for the evaluation, outlining Hertfordshire's economic ambitions and the wider business support landscape within which Get Enterprising operates.

Chapter 4: describes the current Get Enterprising delivery model, including its objectives, support offer, client journey and theory of change.

Chapter 5: examines programme performance, reach and outcomes. It reviews participation levels, client characteristics and outcome achievement, and considers progress since the previous evaluation undertaken in 2022.

Chapter 6: presents evidence gathered from participating businesses, exploring their experiences of the programme, perceived value of support and views on future needs.

Chapter 7: examines the programme's role within Hertfordshire's wider business support ecosystem. It considers relationships with referral partners, progression pathways and the programme's connection with the Hertfordshire Growth Hub and other forms of business support.

Chapter 8: provides a comparative analysis of performance across Hertfordshire's districts and boroughs, identifying variations in participation, outcomes and demand, and exploring the factors that may explain these differences.

Chapters 9 to 11 consider the implications of this evidence for future service design and strategic alignment.

Chapter 9: assesses the extent to which Get Enterprising aligns with the priorities of the Hertfordshire Economic Strategy 2026–2036, including innovation, digital adoption, productivity, sustainability and inclusive growth.

Chapter 10: draws together evidence from across the evaluation to assess whether the current service model remains fit for purpose. It considers the appropriateness of the programme's scope, targeting, delivery approach and progression pathways in the context of future business support needs.

Chapter 11: reviews the current performance framework and considers options for future measurement and evaluation. It examines whether existing indicators adequately capture programme value and explores opportunities to strengthen future performance management arrangements.

Chapters 12 and 13 bring together the findings to provide an overall assessment of the programme and recommendations for future commissioning.

Chapter 12: presents overall conclusions of the evaluation, structured around core evaluation questions.

Chapter 13: sets out recommendations for future service design, delivery, performance measurement and commissioning.

Supporting evidence, detailed data tables and additional analysis are provided within the appendices.

2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This evaluation has been undertaken using a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative performance analysis with qualitative evidence gathered from stakeholders, service users and documentary sources.

The intention has been not only to assess historical performance, but also to examine whether the current Get Enterprising model remains appropriate for Hertfordshire's future economic priorities and future commissioning arrangements.

The methodology has therefore been designed to answer the five evaluation questions set out in Chapter 1 by bringing together multiple sources of evidence and comparing findings across them.

2.2 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The evaluation has been structured around five core questions:

- Is Get Enterprising still the right intervention, delivered in the right way, for Hertfordshire's future needs?
- Is Get Enterprising supporting the right businesses?
- Is the current support offer meeting business needs effectively?
- How effectively does Get Enterprising operate within Hertfordshire's wider business support ecosystem?
- How should Get Enterprising evolve to maximise its contribution to Hertfordshire's future economic ambitions?

These questions have **informed both the design of the consultation programme and the subsequent analysis.**

2.3 DOCUMENTARY REVIEW

A comprehensive review of programme documentation has been undertaken to understand the evolution, delivery and performance of Get Enterprising.

Documents reviewed include:

- the 2022 independent evaluation
- current and previous service specifications
- procurement documentation
- annual performance reports
- district performance reports
- district profiling information
- business demographic analysis
- contract variations
- monitoring information
- the Hertfordshire Economic Strategy 2026–2036
- supporting programme documentation and service information.

The documentary review established the programme context, informed the evaluation framework and identified key themes for further exploration through stakeholder and client consultation.

2.4 PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

Programme performance has been assessed using monitoring information covering delivery since the previous evaluation.

Analysis includes:

- contractual outputs and outcomes
- performance against annual targets
- trends over time
- district and borough comparisons
- referral activity
- business creation
- employment outcomes
- customer satisfaction

Where appropriate, current performance has been compared with findings from the 2022 evaluation to assess progress over time.

2.5 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Semi-structured interviews have been undertaken with organisations involved in the design, commissioning, delivery and wider business support ecosystem surrounding Get Enterprising.

Stakeholder consultation was designed to explore:

- the continuing need for the service
- programme strengths and weaknesses
- partnership working
- referral pathways
- alignment with the Hertfordshire Economic Strategy
- future commissioning considerations
- opportunities for service improvement

Stakeholder views have been analysed alongside documentary and performance evidence to identify areas of consensus and differing perspectives. Stakeholders included Hertfordshire Futures and the Get Enterprising team from WENTA, Local Authority partners and other service providers.

2.6 BUSINESS CONSULTATION

Feedback has been gathered from businesses and entrepreneurs who have received support through Get Enterprising using an online survey, supplemented where appropriate by follow-up interviews.

Consultation explored:

- client experience
- perceived value
- business outcomes
- future support needs
- awareness of wider business support
- future ambitions
- suggestions for service improvement

Findings are presented anonymously throughout the report.

2.7 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The evaluation includes comparative analysis across Hertfordshire's districts and boroughs to identify variations in programme demand, client characteristics and performance. Comparisons are also made with the findings of the previous evaluation undertaken in 2022 in order to assess how the programme has evolved and whether earlier recommendations have been addressed.

2.8 ASSESSMENT AGAINST STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

A key feature of this evaluation is the assessment of Get Enterprising against the Hertfordshire Economic Strategy 2026–2036. This considers the extent to which the current programme contributes to wider economic ambitions relating to entrepreneurship, innovation, productivity, digital adoption, sustainability and inclusive growth, together with the implications for future service design and commissioning.

2.9 LIMITATIONS

As with all evaluations, this assessment has some limitations.

The evaluation relies upon programme monitoring information supplied by the contractor and Hertfordshire Futures, together with evidence gathered from stakeholders and participating businesses. While every effort has been made to triangulate findings across multiple evidence sources, some longer-term business outcomes—such as business survival, turnover growth and productivity improvements—are not routinely monitored and therefore cannot be assessed comprehensively.

The findings should therefore be interpreted as an evidence-based assessment of programme effectiveness rather than a complete economic impact evaluation.

3. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

3.1 ENTERPRISE SUPPORT WITHIN HERTFORDSHIRE

The potential workforce market for a service; data from the ONS labour force survey showed an employment rate of 80.4% in Hertfordshire in the year ending September 2025. This compares to a rate of 75.6% for GB and 78.6% in the East of England. In all, Hertfordshire now had 644,300 people in employment compared to 632,400 (80.2%) people at the end of September 2024.

In Hertfordshire, a greater decline in business stock than the rest of the UK has been measured, the startup rate is 1% lower than the UK average, with significant micro business contraction though surviving businesses perform well.

Hertfordshire therefore has a diverse and dynamic business base characterised by high levels of entrepreneurial activity and a significant population of small and micro businesses. New business creation and success remain important contributors to economic growth, employment and innovation across the county.

However, entrepreneurship alone does not guarantee economic success. Many businesses face significant challenges during the transition from business idea to sustainable trading operation. Access to appropriate advice, mentoring and specialist support can therefore play an important role in improving business resilience and long-term success.

The 2022 evaluation concluded that a genuine gap existed between traditional start-up support and growth-focused business support, creating a need for an intermediate offer capable of supporting businesses through the early stages of development. Evidence gathered as part of this evaluation suggests that demand for this type of support remains substantial across Hertfordshire.

3.2 HERTFORDSHIRE ECONOMIC STRATEGY 2026–2036

The Hertfordshire Economic Strategy 2026–2036 sets out a vision for the county to become the UK's Innovation Heartland by 2036. The Strategy seeks to build upon Hertfordshire's existing economic strengths, including a £50 billion economy, more than 66,000 businesses and nationally significant clusters in life sciences, advanced manufacturing, digital technologies, clean growth and the creative industries.

The Strategy places innovation, inclusion and sustainability at the centre of future growth and identifies five priorities that will drive economic development over the next decade:

- Digital adoption and artificial intelligence
- Skills and participation
- Innovation and clean growth
- Thriving places
- Hertfordshire's national and international role

Collectively, these priorities seek to increase productivity, stimulate innovation, support business competitiveness and create opportunities for residents across the county.

For enterprise support programmes such as Get Enterprising, the Strategy provides an important framework against which future relevance and effectiveness can be assessed.

3.3 DIGITAL CREATIVITY AT THE HEART OF BUSINESS

A central theme within the Economic Strategy is the increasing importance of digital adoption, artificial intelligence and technological innovation as drivers of productivity and business growth. Hertfordshire's ambition is not simply to support more businesses, but to support businesses that are capable of embracing new technologies, improving productivity and competing successfully within increasingly digital markets.

Evidence from Get Enterprising already suggests that business demand is evolving in this direction. While start-up support remains a core area of activity, businesses across several districts are increasingly seeking support relating to artificial intelligence, digital marketing, websites, content creation and social media. In some areas, AI has emerged as one of the most frequently requested support themes.

This emerging demand suggests that digital capability is becoming an increasingly important component of enterprise support and raises important questions regarding how future provision should evolve to support technological adoption and business innovation.

3.4 COMMERCIALISATION, INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Economic Strategy emphasises the importance of translating innovation into commercial opportunity and supporting businesses to become more productive, resilient and sustainable. Innovation is viewed not only in terms of research and development, but also through the adoption of new technologies, products, services and business models. Sustainability similarly extends beyond environmental considerations to include long-term business resilience and adaptability.

Although Get Enterprising has traditionally focused on business creation and early-stage development, there is growing evidence that clients increasingly seek support that extends beyond start-up activity. Requests for assistance relating to growth planning, digital transformation, marketing strategy and business development suggest that many businesses are looking to strengthen their long-term competitiveness rather than simply establish themselves.

This raises an important strategic question for the evaluation: should the future programme continue to focus primarily on business creation, or should it place greater emphasis on innovation, productivity and business development outcomes that align more directly with Hertfordshire's long-term economic ambitions?

3.5 THE BUSINESS SUPPORT LANDSCAPE

Hertfordshire's business support landscape includes a range of local, regional and national provision. Within this landscape, Get Enterprising occupies a distinctive position, focusing primarily on entrepreneurs and businesses in the earliest stages of development.

Alongside Get Enterprising, businesses may access support through the Hertfordshire Growth Hub, local authority initiatives, specialist sector programmes, skills providers and private sector advisory services. The effectiveness of the overall support ecosystem depends not only on the quality of individual programmes but on the extent to which businesses can navigate between them and access support appropriate to their stage of development.

The Economic Strategy highlights the importance of creating a connected support ecosystem capable of helping businesses move from start-up through to innovation, scaling and growth. This places particular importance on referral pathways, partnership working and progression routes between programmes. The effectiveness of these relationships will therefore be a recurring theme throughout this evaluation.

3.6 THE ROLE OF GET ENTERPRISING WITHIN THE BUSINESS JOURNEY

Evidence from programme monitoring suggests that the majority of clients remain pre-start entrepreneurs or businesses in their first year of trading. The programme therefore acts primarily as an entry point into the wider business support system, helping businesses establish strong foundations before progressing to more specialised forms of support.

The programme's intended role is not only to support business creation but also to help businesses become more resilient, improve their capabilities and access further support where appropriate. As such, it represents an important component within the broader business support journey.

4. THE CURRENT GET ENTERPRISING SERVICE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Get Enterprising is Hertfordshire Futures' dedicated enterprise support programme for individuals considering self-employment and businesses in the earliest stages of development. It forms an important component of the county's wider business support ecosystem, providing practical advice and guidance to help entrepreneurs establish resilient businesses whilst creating a pathway towards longer-term growth support where appropriate.

The service is currently delivered under contract by Wenta, an established enterprise agency with extensive experience of supporting new and early-stage businesses across Hertfordshire and neighbouring areas. Whilst delivery is outsourced, the service is commissioned, funded and contract managed by Hertfordshire Futures against agreed outputs and outcomes.

4.2 SERVICE PURPOSE

The principal purpose of Get Enterprising is to improve business survival and increase the number of successful business start-ups across Hertfordshire by providing timely and accessible support to those at the earliest stages of the business journey.

The service recognises that many new businesses fail within their first few years of trading and seeks to improve business resilience through tailored advice, practical guidance and signposting to wider sources of support. Rather than focusing solely on business creation, the programme aims to ensure that new businesses are well prepared, commercially viable and capable of developing sustainable trading activity.

The service also contributes to Hertfordshire Futures' wider ambition of creating an integrated business support pathway, helping entrepreneurs move from initial business ideas towards specialist growth support where appropriate.

4.3 CLIENT GROUPS

The service currently supports two principal client groups.

The first comprises individuals considering starting a business who require advice before trading commences. Support focuses on testing business ideas, developing business plans, understanding legal and financial responsibilities and improving confidence prior to launch.

The second comprises businesses that have recently commenced trading and require practical support to establish sustainable operations. Typical areas of support include financial management, marketing, sales, business planning, digital capability, regulatory compliance and wider business development.

Whilst contractual definitions distinguish between pre-start and early-stage businesses, in practice the support provided is tailored to individual business needs, recognising that businesses develop at different rates and require differing levels of intervention.

4.4 DELIVERY MODEL

The programme combines several complementary methods of delivery designed to meet different business needs and learning preferences.

Individual business advice forms the core of the service, with experienced advisers providing one-to-one support tailored to each client's circumstances. This is supplemented by workshops, webinars and online resources covering common business topics, allowing clients to access additional learning whilst making efficient use of adviser time.

The delivery model is intended to combine accessibility with flexibility. Clients are able to access support through a range of channels, including online and face-to-face engagement where appropriate, enabling advisers to respond to differing client preferences and geographical locations.

Alongside direct advice, the service also provides access to wider specialist support through referrals to partner organisations where additional expertise is required.

A simplified Theory of Change Model could be as follows as a useful point to re-visit pre, during and post procurement, and then again at the end of the contract to consider alongside delivered metrics.



4.5 POSITION WITHIN THE BUSINESS SUPPORT ECOSYSTEM

Get Enterprising operates as one element within Hertfordshire's wider business support landscape. The programme is designed to provide dedicated support for individuals and businesses at the earliest stages of development, complementing rather than duplicating the services offered by organisations such as the Hertfordshire Growth Hub, local authorities, specialist providers and business support partners.

The original design of the programme envisaged Get Enterprising acting as an entry point into a wider business support pathway, with businesses progressing to more specialist growth support as they mature. Stakeholder consultation suggests that this remains an important principle, although the effectiveness of referral pathways and business progression is explored later in this report.

4.6 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The current contract specifies a range of outputs and outcomes against which delivery is monitored. These include the number of businesses receiving support, business starts, employment outcomes and onward referrals to partner organisations.

Performance is reviewed through regular contract management arrangements between Hertfordshire Futures and the delivery partner, supported by monitoring information and periodic reporting. Performance against these measures is considered in detail in Chapter 5.

Alongside contractual monitoring, the programme has evolved through periodic contract variations reflecting changing economic circumstances and funding arrangements, demonstrating a degree of flexibility in responding to emerging needs.

4.7 EVOLUTION OF THE SERVICE

Although the core purpose of Get Enterprising has remained consistent, the service has evolved over time in response to changes in funding, economic conditions and business demand.

The programme has broadened from its earlier emphasis on established early-stage businesses to incorporate greater support for pre-start enterprises following the introduction of additional funding streams.

More recently, the withdrawal of UK Shared Prosperity Funding has required Hertfordshire Futures to provide additional investment in order to maintain service continuity whilst longer-term funding arrangements are explored.

At the same time, wider economic conditions have influenced client demand, with stakeholders observing that businesses are often remaining in the early-stage support phase for longer than originally anticipated as they prioritise resilience and survival before pursuing business growth.

These changing market conditions provide important context for the evaluation of the current delivery model in later chapters.

4.8 SUMMARY

Get Enterprising represents a mature and well-established enterprise support programme that occupies a distinct role within Hertfordshire's business support ecosystem. It provides a structured pathway for individuals considering self-employment and businesses in the earliest stages of development, combining personalised advice with wider business support resources.

The service has adapted over time in response to changing economic conditions and funding arrangements whilst retaining its core focus on supporting entrepreneurship and business resilience.

The following chapters assess how effectively this delivery model is performing, the extent to which it remains aligned with Hertfordshire's strategic ambitions and whether any changes should be considered as part of future commissioning.

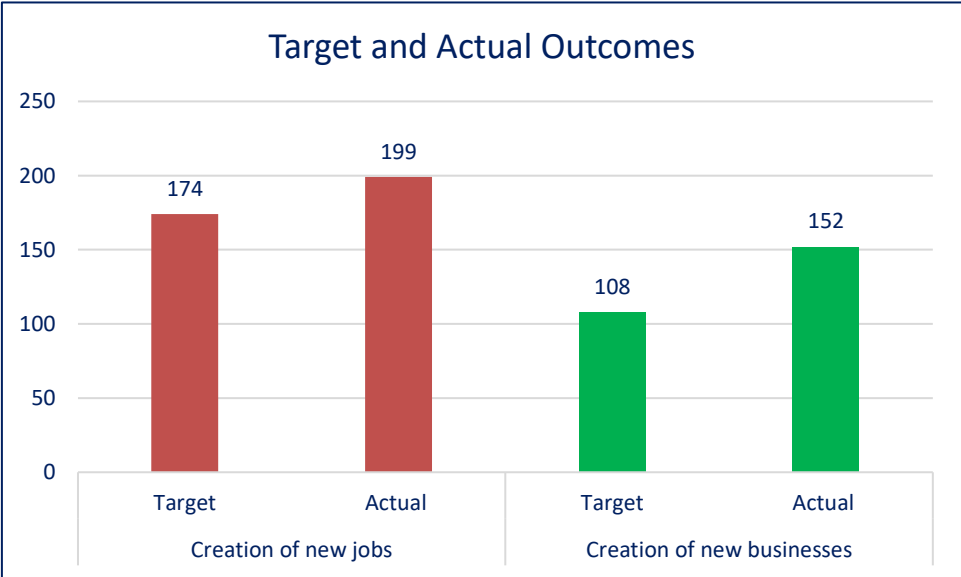
5. PERFORMANCE, REACH AND PROGRESS SINCE 2022

5.1 OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

Get Enterprising continued to deliver strong levels of activity and outcome achievement during 2025/26. Across both core-funded and UK Shared Prosperity Fund-supported activity, the programme met or exceeded most contractual targets.

A total of 301 businesses received at least six hours of non-financial support against a combined target of 301, representing full achievement of the annual target. Support provided to potential entrepreneurs also exceeded expectations, with 273 individuals receiving assistance to become business ready compared with a target of 270.

Performance against outcome measures was particularly strong. The programme supported the creation of 199 jobs against a target of 174 and facilitated the creation of 152 new businesses compared with a target of 108. Customer satisfaction remained exceptionally high at 92 per cent, significantly above the contractual requirement of 80 per cent.



Performance against referral targets presented a more mixed picture. Referrals to other business support providers significantly exceeded target, with 97 referrals recorded against a target of 50.

By contrast, referrals to the Hertfordshire Growth Hub remained below target, with eight referrals recorded against an expectation of twenty. This is a particularly important finding given the programme's intended role in supporting progression through the wider business support ecosystem and will be explored further in Chapter 7.

Taken together, these results indicate that the programme continued to generate strong levels of engagement and positive business outcomes. The extent to which these achievements reflect the optimal service model, however, requires further consideration and forms a central theme of this evaluation.

	Target	Actual	Assessment
Businesses receiving 6+ hours support	301	301	Achieved
Potential entrepreneurs supported	270	273	Exceeded
Jobs created	174	199	Exceeded
New businesses created	108	152	Significantly exceeded
Referrals to Growth Hub	20	8	Below target
Referrals to other support	50	97	Significantly exceeded
Customer satisfaction	80%	92%	Exceeded

Note: The 2022 evaluation highlighted concerns around progression to the Growth Hub and the effectiveness of referral pathways. Four years later, Growth Hub referrals remain the only KPI not being achieved.

5.2 REACH AND PARTICIPATION

Get Enterprising has achieved a broad geographical reach across Hertfordshire, supporting businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs in all participating local authority areas. Participation levels vary between districts, reflecting differences in population size, business density, entrepreneurial activity and local referral networks rather than any obvious inconsistency in programme delivery.

Evidence from the district profiling analysis suggests that participation is influenced by a combination of demographic, economic and behavioural factors, including levels of deprivation, rates of self-employment, awareness of support services and the maturity of local business ecosystems.

Across the county, engagement remains strongest amongst individuals at the earliest stages of business development. The majority of clients are either pre-start entrepreneurs or businesses trading for less than one year. This pattern is evident across almost every district and indicates that the programme continues to fulfil its original role of supporting business creation and early-stage development. While some more established businesses continue to engage with the programme, particularly those seeking specialist advice or support for growth, the dominant client profile remains that of an entrepreneur preparing to start a business or navigating the challenges of the first year of trading.

The consistency of this pattern suggests that demand for start-up support remains substantial across Hertfordshire. This is significant given that one of the key questions for this evaluation is whether the original rationale for Get Enterprising remains valid. At least in terms of demand, the evidence indicates a continuing need for support aimed at business creation and early-stage sustainability.

5.3 CLIENT CHARACTERISTICS

Although participation levels vary geographically, client needs show a striking degree of consistency across the county.

The most frequently requested support theme remains business start-up advice. "How to Start" is consistently identified as one of the most popular support topics across almost all districts and frequently emerges as the single largest area of demand. Alongside this, businesses continue to seek support relating to business planning, financial management, marketing and customer acquisition. These themes are characteristic of businesses in the earliest stages of development and reinforce the conclusion that Get Enterprising remains predominantly a start-up and early-stage business support programme.

Alongside these traditional business support needs, a second and increasingly important theme is emerging. Demand for support relating to digital capability, online marketing and artificial intelligence appears across most districts and, in some areas, now rivals or exceeds demand for more conventional start-up advice. AI-related support was identified as the leading area of demand in both St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield, while digital marketing featured prominently in several other districts. This suggests that businesses are increasingly seeking support not simply to establish themselves, but to adapt to changing technologies and evolving customer behaviours.

The evidence therefore points towards the existence of two overlapping client groups. The first consists of aspiring entrepreneurs and very early-stage businesses requiring support with business formation, planning and initial market entry. The second comprises more established businesses seeking support with digital adoption, marketing, growth planning and business resilience. While these groups are not mutually exclusive, they raise important questions regarding the future focus of the programme and whether a single delivery model can continue to meet the needs of both effectively.

Client businesses are drawn from a wide range of sectors, although business services, consultancy, creative industries, health and wellbeing, retail and food-related activities appear particularly well represented. The diversity of sectors supported suggests that the programme continues to operate as a universal enterprise support offer rather than targeting specific industries or priority sectors. Whether this remains the most appropriate approach will be considered later in the report.

5.4 BUSINESS STARTS, JOBS AND OTHER OUTCOMES

The programme has continued to generate positive business creation and employment outcomes across Hertfordshire. Performance data indicates that targets relating to new business creation and job generation have been exceeded at programme level, suggesting that the service continues to make a measurable contribution to enterprise development and local economic activity.

District-level evidence demonstrates that positive outcomes are being achieved across a broad range of localities. New businesses and employment outcomes have been recorded throughout the county, indicating that programme benefits are not concentrated within a small number of districts.

Although the scale of outcomes varies geographically, the evidence suggests that the programme is contributing to business formation and early-stage business sustainability across Hertfordshire.

The programme's impact extends beyond business creation alone. Client case studies and advisory records indicate that support is frequently used to improve business planning, strengthen marketing capability, increase confidence, address financial challenges and support business resilience. These outcomes are often more difficult to quantify than business starts or employment creation, yet they represent important precursors to longer-term business success and sustainability.

The challenge for future evaluation and performance measurement is therefore not simply to count business starts and jobs, but to capture the wider developmental outcomes that businesses experience as a result of support.

5.5 FINDINGS FROM THE 2022 EVALUATION

The 2022 summative assessment concluded that Get Enterprising addressed a genuine and continuing gap within Hertfordshire's business support landscape. The evaluation found that, while start-up support and Growth Hub provision existed, there was limited structured support available to businesses transitioning from initial start-up into the early stages of growth and sustainability.

Get Enterprising was therefore fulfilling an important "bridge" function, supporting businesses beyond start-up and helping them progress towards more advanced forms of business support.

The evaluation also concluded that the original market failure identified when the programme was established remained valid. Hertfordshire continued to experience challenges relating to business formation, survival and growth, with evidence suggesting that many early-stage businesses lacked access to the support required to become sustainable and growth-oriented enterprises. The programme was therefore considered strategically relevant and aligned with wider economic development objectives.

Performance against contractual targets was assessed positively. At the time of evaluation, the programme had already exceeded most of its contractual output targets despite operating during the COVID-19 pandemic. Performance was particularly strong in relation to support for new businesses, support for potential entrepreneurs and reported employment outcomes. Referrals to the Hertfordshire Growth Hub also exceeded target, although referral volumes to other support organisations remained below expectation.

Client feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Businesses valued the accessibility of support, the quality of advice and the flexibility of the delivery approach. Many respondents highlighted the value of one-to-one support and reported that the programme had improved confidence, strengthened business planning and supported business development. A recurring theme, however, was that more established businesses often sought highly tailored advice and specialist expertise rather than generic workshop-based provision. Some respondents also questioned the value of support being measured through hours of engagement rather than achievement of meaningful outcomes.

The evaluation identified several issues relating to programme design and performance measurement. In particular, concerns were raised regarding the complexity of the performance framework, the usefulness of some referral measures and the emphasis placed on minimum support hours. The evaluation argued that future performance frameworks should focus more heavily on outcomes and client needs rather than volume-based activity measures.

The relationship between Get Enterprising and the Hertfordshire Growth Hub was identified as an area requiring further development. While both organisations shared a common understanding of the intended referral process, evidence suggested that referral pathways were not always consistently implemented. There was limited feedback regarding the outcomes of referrals and some uncertainty among businesses regarding progression from Get Enterprising into growth-focused support. The evaluation questioned whether referral ambitions were sufficiently ambitious given that one of the programme's original objectives was to strengthen progression into Growth Hub services.

The evaluation also highlighted a broader strategic question regarding targeting. While Get Enterprising successfully supported a wide range of entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses, the report suggested that greater consideration could be given to identifying and supporting businesses with stronger growth potential. The evaluation noted that stronger targeting could increase the number of businesses progressing into growth support and contribute more directly to economic growth objectives.

Overall, the 2022 evaluation concluded that Get Enterprising was a well-managed and effective programme that addressed an important gap in the business support ecosystem. However, it also identified opportunities to strengthen progression pathways, improve performance measures and consider whether future provision should place greater emphasis on growth potential and business outcomes.

Key Messages from the 2022 Evaluation

- The rationale for Get Enterprising remained strong and the original market failure continued to exist.
- Contractual performance was strong, with most targets exceeded despite the challenges of COVID-19.
- Businesses valued the programme highly and reported positive impacts on confidence, capability and business development.
- More established businesses often required specialist and tailored support rather than generic provision.
- The referral relationship with the Growth Hub required strengthening.
- The performance framework placed too much emphasis on support volumes and not enough on outcomes.
- Future programme design should consider progression pathways and the needs of higher-growth businesses.

5.6 PROGRESS SINCE 2022

The previous independent evaluation, completed in 2022, concluded that Get Enterprising addressed a continuing market need and was valued by participating businesses. It also recognised the importance of maintaining strong links with the wider business support ecosystem and ensuring that the programme continued to evolve alongside changing economic conditions.

Evidence gathered through the current evaluation suggests that these conclusions remain largely valid. The programme continues to demonstrate strong demand from prospective entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses and has consistently achieved or exceeded most of its contractual output and outcome targets throughout the current contract period. Over the three years evaluated, Get Enterprising supported 796 businesses through six hours or more of intensive support and provided pre-start assistance to 717 prospective entrepreneurs, contributing to the creation of 490 new businesses and 636 jobs across Hertfordshire. The programme also generated 208 referrals to wider business support organisations, reflecting its role within the broader business support ecosystem.

Perhaps more significantly, the programme has demonstrated an ability to adapt to changing economic circumstances. Since 2022, advisers have increasingly focused on helping businesses respond to inflationary pressures, rising operating costs and wider economic uncertainty.

Stakeholder consultation indicated that many businesses now require greater emphasis on resilience, financial planning and sustainable development than was previously the case, with advisers increasingly supporting businesses to establish secure foundations before pursuing growth.

The evaluation also found evidence that programme content has evolved in response to changing business needs. Digital marketing, technology adoption and, more recently, Artificial Intelligence have become increasingly important areas of support. The successful introduction of AI-focused workshops and events demonstrates that the programme has retained sufficient flexibility to respond to emerging trends without fundamentally changing its overall purpose.

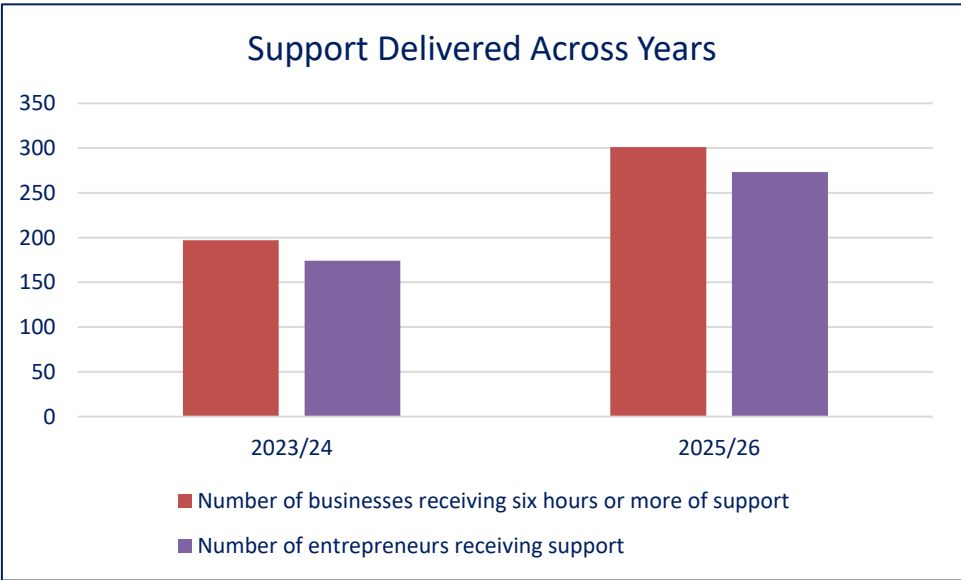
Not all developments have been positive. Referrals to the Hertfordshire Growth Hub have declined steadily over the contract period, reducing from 21 during 2023/24 to eight during 2025/26. However, evidence gathered from programme managers, commissioners and wider stakeholders consistently suggests that this reflects changing client behaviour rather than weakening partnership arrangements. Businesses are taking longer to establish themselves commercially, with many remaining within the early-stage support offer for longer before becoming ready for specialist growth support. This finding reinforces the conclusion that progression should increasingly be considered in terms of business readiness rather than business age or contractual expectations.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the principal findings of the 2022 evaluation remain relevant. However, the environment in which the programme now operates has changed considerably. Future commissioning will therefore need to retain the strengths of the current model whilst ensuring that it continues to respond to evolving business needs and strategic priorities.

5.7 PERFORMANCE TRENDS AND EMERGING ISSUES

Performance data demonstrates that Get Enterprising has maintained consistently high levels of delivery throughout the evaluation period, despite operating within an increasingly challenging economic environment.

Support volumes increased substantially during the life of the contract. The number of businesses receiving six hours or more of support increased from 197 during 2023/24 to 301 during 2025/26, whilst support provided to prospective entrepreneurs increased from 174 to 273 over the same period. This indicates continuing demand for enterprise support across Hertfordshire and suggests that the programme has successfully maintained engagement despite wider economic uncertainty.



Business creation and employment outcomes have also remained strong. Although business starts reduced slightly during the final year following exceptionally high delivery during 2024/25, overall performance remained significantly above current contractual requirements and continued to demonstrate the programme's ability to convert enterprise activity into measurable economic outcomes. Job creation followed a similar pattern, remaining consistently strong across the three-year period despite evidence that businesses are taking longer to establish and recruit.

One of the most notable trends concerns referrals into the wider business support ecosystem. Referrals to specialist support organisations more than doubled during the evaluation period, increasing from 44 in 2023/24 to 97 in 2025/26.

This reflects increasing recognition that early-stage businesses frequently require access to specialist expertise in areas such as finance, digital capability, wellbeing and specialist advisory services. It also reinforces the programme's role as an entry point into Hertfordshire's wider business support landscape rather than a standalone intervention.

By contrast, referrals to the Hertfordshire Growth Hub declined throughout the contract. Considered in isolation, this might suggest reduced effectiveness of progression arrangements.

However, evidence gathered from stakeholder consultation, programme documentation and contract review meetings provides a more nuanced explanation. Businesses are increasingly taking longer to reach the point at which specialist growth support is appropriate. Advisers also reported growing numbers of businesses seeking to consolidate existing operations, improve resilience and manage economic pressures before pursuing expansion.

These findings suggest that declining referral numbers should not be interpreted simply as underperformance, but as reflecting wider changes in the characteristics and needs of the client population.

The evaluation also identified several broader trends likely to influence future service delivery.

Firstly, businesses increasingly expect flexible methods of engagement, combining one-to-one advice with shorter workshops, webinars and online resources.

Secondly, demand for support relating to digital capability and Artificial Intelligence has grown rapidly, illustrating the need for programme content to evolve alongside technological change.

Thirdly, advisers reported increasing variation in the pace at which businesses develop. Whilst some entrepreneurs progress rapidly towards growth, others require longer periods of support before reaching commercial stability. This reinforces the importance of designing future support pathways around business maturity and readiness rather than relying solely upon elapsed trading time.

Taken together, these trends suggest that the programme has adapted effectively to changing circumstances but also highlight the need for future commissioning arrangements to retain sufficient flexibility to respond to continuing changes in business demand.

5.8 SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

Overall, the evidence presented throughout this chapter indicates that Get Enterprising has performed strongly against its contractual objectives whilst continuing to evolve in response to changing economic conditions.

The programme has consistently achieved or exceeded most contractual outputs and outcomes, demonstrating sustained demand for enterprise support and delivering significant numbers of new businesses, jobs and wider business support referrals across Hertfordshire. Client satisfaction has remained consistently high and stakeholder consultation demonstrates continued confidence in the quality of delivery.

Importantly, the evaluation suggests that performance should not be judged solely against contractual targets. The evidence indicates that the characteristics of early-stage businesses have changed since the programme was originally commissioned. Businesses are taking longer to establish themselves, increasingly require support to build resilience and demonstrate growing demand for advice relating to digital capability, technology adoption and Artificial Intelligence.

These changes help explain some of the shifts observed within the performance data and reinforce the need to interpret quantitative measures alongside qualitative evidence.

The evaluation therefore concludes that the programme has remained both operationally effective and strategically relevant throughout the evaluation period. The principal challenge for future commissioning is not to improve delivery of an underperforming service, but to build upon an established and successful model whilst ensuring that future performance measures, delivery arrangements and progression pathways continue to reflect the evolving needs of Hertfordshire's business community.

6. BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

An important element of the evaluation was understanding the views and experiences of businesses that have received support through Get Enterprising. Evidence was gathered from two sources. Firstly, an independent survey undertaken as part of this evaluation explored client experiences, perceived outcomes and future support needs. Secondly, the evaluation considered customer feedback and Net Promoter Score (NPS) responses routinely collected by the service provider over the period 2024–2026. Together these provide both independent feedback and a broader picture of customer experience, although it should be recognised that the independent survey achieved a relatively low response rate and therefore findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

6.2 OVERALL EXPERIENCE OF THE SERVICE

Feedback from both evidence sources indicates consistently high levels of satisfaction with the support provided. Respondents described advisers as knowledgeable, approachable and experienced, valuing both the quality of individual advice and the practical relevance of workshops and webinars. Many comments referred to the reassurance provided during what is often a challenging stage of establishing or developing a business, whilst others highlighted the professionalism of advisers and the accessibility of support.

The independent survey similarly found that all respondents considered the support to have been either very useful or quite useful, with most indicating that the amount of support received was about right.

Across the wider customer feedback collected by Wenta, recommendations were overwhelmingly positive, with many respondents stating that they would recommend the service to others. Recurring themes included the value of experienced advisers, practical guidance, encouragement and the availability of free business support.

6.3 PERCEIVED OUTCOMES

Businesses reported a range of benefits arising from their participation in the programme. The most commonly identified outcomes included increased confidence, improved digital skills, better business planning and improved marketing capability. Several respondents also indicated that the support had helped them access wider sources of assistance or develop new business opportunities.

Importantly, most respondents agreed with the statement that, without Get Enterprising, their business would be less developed than it is today. Although based on a relatively small sample, this finding provides qualitative evidence that businesses perceive the programme to have made a meaningful contribution to their development rather than simply providing information.

The accompanying customer comments reinforce this conclusion. Businesses frequently described the support as increasing confidence, providing clarity and helping translate business ideas into practical actions. Several also referred to the value of being able to discuss issues with experienced advisers who understood the realities of running a business.

6.4 FUTURE BUSINESS AMBITIONS

One of the aims of the evaluation was to understand whether businesses supported through Get Enterprising aspire to remain lifestyle businesses or have ambitions for future growth.

Although respondent numbers were limited, survey findings suggest a mixed picture. Some businesses expected to remain relatively small or continue operating as sole traders, whilst others expressed ambitions to recruit staff, increase their customer base or grow into substantially larger businesses over the next two to five years.

This finding supports the view expressed by several stakeholders that businesses progress at different rates and that support pathways should be based upon business readiness and ambition rather than solely on business age. It also suggests there may be opportunities to identify businesses with stronger growth aspirations earlier in their development and consider whether they would benefit from progression to specialist growth support.

6.5 FUTURE SUPPORT NEEDS

Respondents identified continuing demand for support across a broad range of business topics. Business growth, sales, finance and funding, marketing, digital capability and Artificial Intelligence featured prominently amongst the areas where additional support would be most valuable.

These findings broadly reflect wider trends identified through programme monitoring and stakeholder consultation, suggesting that business support needs continue to evolve alongside changing economic conditions and technological developments. The growing interest in AI and digital tools, in particular, reinforces the importance of ensuring that future programme content remains responsive to emerging business needs.

6.6 Client Suggestions for Improvement

Despite the generally positive feedback, respondents also identified opportunities for further enhancement. Suggestions included presenting information in more accessible formats, continuing to expand practical training opportunities and maintaining the availability of experienced advisers. Equally, several respondents felt that the current service should remain largely unchanged, emphasising the value of receiving honest, practical advice from advisers with real business experience.

6.7 SUMMARY

Overall, business feedback presents a consistently positive picture of the Get Enterprising service. Clients value the practical nature of the advice, the experience of advisers and the confidence gained through participating in the programme. Whilst the independent survey response rate limits the extent to which findings can be generalised, the consistency between these responses and the wider customer feedback collected routinely by Wenta provides additional confidence in the overall findings.

The evidence also highlights several themes that are explored further elsewhere in the report, including changing business support needs, differing levels of business ambition and the importance of ensuring that businesses are able to progress through the wider business support ecosystem as their needs evolve.

7. GET ENTERPRISING WITHIN THE BUSINESS SUPPORT ECOSYSTEM

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Get Enterprising operates within a wider business support landscape that includes the Hertfordshire Growth Hub, local authorities, universities, sector organisations, skills providers and other specialist business support services. The effectiveness of the programme therefore depends not only on the quality of support it delivers directly, but also on how effectively it connects businesses to wider sources of advice, expertise and growth support.

A key objective of this evaluation is to assess the extent to which Get Enterprising functions as part of an integrated business support ecosystem. This includes consideration of referral pathways, partnership working, progression routes and the programme's contribution to a coherent business support journey for entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses.

7.2 POSITIONING OF GET ENTERPRISING

The evidence reviewed to date suggests that Get Enterprising occupies a distinct position within Hertfordshire's business support offer.

The programme primarily supports pre-start entrepreneurs and businesses in the earliest stages of trading. Across most districts, the majority of clients are either preparing to start a business or have been trading for less than one year. Demand remains heavily concentrated around business start-up, business planning, financial management, marketing and other forms of foundational business support.

This pattern is consistent with the original rationale for the programme, namely to support entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses that may not yet be ready to engage with more growth-focused forms of business support. The evidence therefore suggests that Get Enterprising continues to fulfil an important gateway function within the wider business support system.

At the same time, there is evidence that some clients seek support extending beyond basic start-up activity. Growing demand for assistance relating to artificial intelligence, digital marketing, growth planning and business resilience suggests that the programme increasingly supports businesses seeking to move beyond survival and towards development and growth. This raises important questions regarding the relationship between Get Enterprising and other support services designed to assist more established businesses.

7.3 RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GROWTH HUB

The relationship between Get Enterprising and the Hertfordshire Growth Hub is strategically important because together the two programmes are intended to provide a continuum of support from business creation through to business growth.

The 2022 evaluation concluded that this relationship was generally understood by delivery partners but that progression pathways were not always operating consistently in practice. The evaluation highlighted uncertainty regarding referral processes, limited feedback on referral outcomes and concerns that progression ambitions were not being fully realised.

Current performance data suggests that this remains an area requiring further consideration. While most programme targets have been achieved or exceeded, referrals to the Growth Hub remain below target.

By contrast, referrals to other support organisations significantly exceed contractual expectations. At this stage it is not possible to determine whether lower referral volumes reflect weaknesses in referral processes, limitations in client readiness, changing business needs or the availability of alternative support routes. This issue will therefore form an important theme for stakeholder consultation and business interviews.

Key questions for further investigation include:

- Do businesses clearly understand the distinction between Get Enterprising and Growth Hub services?
- Are referral criteria understood consistently by advisors and partners?
- Is there a clear and measurable progression journey between the two programmes?
- Are businesses receiving support at the most appropriate stage of development?
- How effectively are referral outcomes tracked and monitored?

7.4 RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER REFERRAL PARTNERS

Beyond the Growth Hub, Get Enterprising operates within a network of local authorities, community organisations, education providers and other business support agencies.

Evidence from the district profiling work suggests that local referral ecosystems play an important role in shaping programme reach and participation. Areas with stronger awareness of the programme and more established referral relationships appear more likely to generate higher levels of engagement.

Conversely, lower participation may sometimes reflect weaker referral networks rather than lower underlying demand for support. This finding suggests that partnership working may be a significant factor in programme effectiveness. Understanding the role of referral partners, and the extent to which referral arrangements operate consistently across Hertfordshire, will therefore form an important component of the evaluation.

Stakeholder consultation suggests that Get Enterprising is well integrated within Hertfordshire's business support landscape and is regarded as a valued partner by organisations providing complementary services. Most stakeholders described long-standing and positive working relationships with the delivery team, supported by regular communication, joint promotion and reciprocal signposting of businesses where appropriate. Although the nature of interaction varies between organisations, there was broad agreement that Get Enterprising plays an important role within the wider business support ecosystem and that its advisers are well regarded for their knowledge, accessibility and practical support.

Stakeholders consistently recognised the continuing importance of having a dedicated service focused on pre-start and early-stage businesses. Several commented that Get Enterprising occupies a distinct position within the business support landscape, providing specialist support that is not generally available through other programmes. This was seen as particularly important in ensuring that entrepreneurs receive appropriate advice before progressing to more specialist or growth-focused interventions. Stakeholders therefore viewed the service as an important component within a broader continuum of business support rather than as a stand-alone programme.

Whilst relationships between organisations were generally viewed positively, consultation also identified opportunities to strengthen referral pathways and collaboration. Several stakeholders suggested that referrals into Get Enterprising are more common than referrals back into the wider business support network. In particular, stakeholders highlighted the importance of ensuring that businesses with the ambition and capability to grow are identified at an early stage and referred onwards to services such as the Hertfordshire Growth Hub when appropriate.

Others suggested that stronger communication between partners, together with improved feedback on referral outcomes, could further enhance collaborative working and help organisations understand the longer-term journey of businesses receiving support.

The consultation also suggested that referral decisions should increasingly be based on business readiness and ambition rather than solely on the age of the business. Several stakeholders observed that the current distinction between pre-start and early-stage businesses does not always reflect the differing needs of individual clients, particularly where businesses develop at different rates or where economic conditions have delayed business growth. This theme is considered further in Chapter 10 when assessing the future design of the service.

7.5 PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND COLLABORATION

Partnership working is particularly important within enterprise support because no single organisation can meet the full range of needs experienced by entrepreneurs and growing businesses.

The current model appears to benefit from a broad range of relationships that enable businesses to access specialist support beyond the core Get Enterprising offer. These may include finance providers, skills organisations, local authorities, sector networks and specialist business advisers.

The effectiveness of these relationships, however, will require further exploration through stakeholder consultation. In particular, the evaluation will seek to understand whether partnership arrangements are strategic and proactive, or primarily transactional and referral-based.

Overall, stakeholders expressed a consistently positive view of the current Get Enterprising delivery model. There was widespread agreement that the combination of one-to-one business advice, workshops, webinars and specialist support provides a flexible and accessible offer capable of meeting the needs of a diverse client base. Particular praise was given to the quality of advisers and the personalised nature of the support, with several stakeholders commenting that businesses particularly value the opportunity to receive practical advice from experienced business advisers rather than generic information.

There was also broad support for maintaining a blended approach to delivery. Whilst online workshops and webinars were recognised as an efficient means of reaching larger numbers of businesses, most stakeholders considered face-to-face advice to remain particularly valuable for new and early-stage entrepreneurs where trust, confidence and detailed discussion are important.

Several suggested that the current balance between individual support and group learning is appropriate, although some felt there remained scope to increase networking opportunities and peer-to-peer learning where this added value to the client experience.

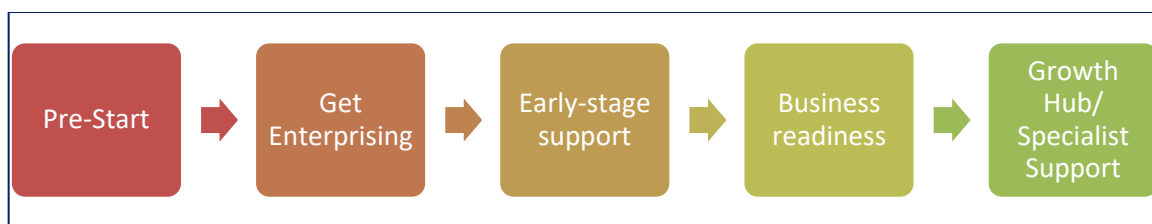
One area where stakeholders expressed more varied views concerned the prescribed duration of support. Although there was broad agreement that support should remain tailored to individual business needs, several interviewees questioned whether the current contractual allocation of four hours for pre-start businesses and six hours for established businesses provides sufficient flexibility. A number suggested that advisers often identify additional needs as relationships develop and that a more flexible allocation of adviser time, based on business complexity and readiness rather than fixed thresholds, could enhance the effectiveness of future provision. Others acknowledged that advisers appear to exercise flexibility in practice, but suggested that future commissioning should consider whether contractual expectations could better reflect this approach.

More generally, stakeholders considered the service to be well managed and responsive to changing business needs. However, consultation also reinforced the importance of continuing to review the delivery model in light of changing economic conditions, the evolving needs of entrepreneurs and the ambitions set out within the Hertfordshire Economic Strategy. Rather than fundamentally redesigning the service, the consensus was that future commissioning should focus on refining and strengthening an already successful model, ensuring that it remains responsive to emerging business needs while continuing to complement the wider business support ecosystem.

7.6 REFERRAL PATHWAYS AND CLIENT JOURNEYS

The available evidence suggests that Get Enterprising functions as an important entry point into the wider business support landscape.

Many clients initially engage with the programme seeking practical support around starting a business, marketing their services or overcoming specific operational challenges. Through ongoing advisory support, webinars and one-to-one sessions, businesses may subsequently be referred to additional forms of assistance where specialist expertise or growth support is required. The diagram below explains the client pathway.



While this model appears logical in principle, relatively little evidence is currently available regarding longer-term progression pathways. In particular, it is not yet clear how many businesses successfully move from start-up support into growth-focused support, nor how consistently these journeys are tracked.

This issue is particularly relevant given the future commissioning focus of the evaluation. If Get Enterprising is intended to form part of an integrated support pathway, then understanding progression outcomes may be as important as measuring immediate programme outputs.

7.7 STRENGTHS OF THE CURRENT ECOSYSTEM

Based on the evidence available to date, several strengths are apparent.

The programme appears to occupy a clearly defined position within the business support landscape, supporting a client group that might otherwise struggle to access structured business advice. Geographic coverage is broad and the programme demonstrates an ability to engage clients from a wide range of sectors and backgrounds.

The flexibility of the delivery model also appears to be a strength. The combination of one-to-one advice, webinars and specialist guidance enables businesses to access support in different ways according to their needs and circumstances. The increasing use of online delivery has further expanded accessibility for many clients.

7.8 GAPS, DUPLICATION AND UNMET NEED

At present there is little evidence of significant duplication within the business support landscape. However, several issues merit further exploration.

The continuing underperformance against Growth Hub referral targets suggests that progression pathways may not be functioning as intended or that current expectations require review.

Similarly, emerging demand for support relating to artificial intelligence, digital transformation and business growth raises questions regarding where responsibility for these forms of support should sit within the wider ecosystem. As client needs evolve, distinctions between start-up support and growth support may become increasingly blurred.

Consultation carried out with stakeholders and survey results from clients identified information management and programme visibility as important considerations for the future development of Get Enterprising. Unlike the Hertfordshire Growth Hub, which operates using Hertfordshire Futures' customer relationship management (CRM) system and dedicated programme website, Get Enterprising currently uses the delivery partner's own CRM platform and web presence, with performance information provided to Hertfordshire Futures through contractual reporting arrangements rather than direct system access. Stakeholders acknowledged that this approach reflects the current contractual model and provides operational flexibility for the delivery partner.

However, several interviewees also recognised that it limits Hertfordshire Futures' ability to access real-time management information, monitor individual client journeys and undertake more detailed analysis of programme activity.

Several stakeholders suggested that greater integration of customer information across the wider business support ecosystem could strengthen referral management, reduce duplication and provide improved evidence of business progression between services. In particular, stakeholders highlighted the potential value of being able to track businesses as they move between Get Enterprising, the Hertfordshire Growth Hub and other specialist support providers. Whilst there was no consensus that a single CRM platform is essential, there was broad agreement that improved sharing of management information and referral intelligence would strengthen strategic oversight and future service evaluation.

A related issue concerned programme branding and visibility. Stakeholders noted that businesses often access the service through Wenta's website and communications, which may lead some clients to perceive Get Enterprising primarily as a Wenta service rather than one commissioned and funded by Hertfordshire Futures. The independent client survey provides some initial support for this observation, with awareness of Hertfordshire Futures as the programme funder appearing relatively limited amongst respondents, although the small sample size means this finding should be treated cautiously.

From a client perspective, stakeholders generally considered that the identity of the delivery organisation is unlikely to influence the quality of support received. However, they recognised that clear recognition of Hertfordshire Futures' commissioning role is important in demonstrating public value, strengthening accountability and supporting future investment decisions. This issue is particularly relevant as Hertfordshire Futures considers future commissioning arrangements and the wider integration of business support services across the county.

7.9 STRATEGIC CONTRIBUTION OF GET ENTERPRISING

Get Enterprising appears to play an important role within Hertfordshire's wider economic development infrastructure. By supporting business creation, encouraging entrepreneurial activity and providing early-stage business support, the programme contributes to a pipeline of businesses that may subsequently progress into more advanced forms of growth support.

The extent to which this progression is occurring effectively remains an important question for the remainder of the evaluation. However, the evidence reviewed to date suggests that the programme continues to address a genuine need and occupies a distinct position within the business support landscape.

7.10 SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

Get Enterprising remains an important component of Hertfordshire's business support ecosystem. The programme appears to fulfil a clear role in supporting entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses, and there is little evidence that its core offer duplicates existing provision.

The principal issue emerging from the evidence is not whether Get Enterprising is needed, but how effectively it connects with the wider support landscape. Referral pathways, progression routes and relationships with key partners, particularly the Growth Hub, are likely to represent important areas for further investigation and are commented upon as part of the stakeholder and business consultation stages of the evaluation.

8. GEOGRAPHIC REACH AND DISTRICT ANALYSIS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

An important objective of this evaluation is to understand whether Get Enterprising has delivered an accessible and effective service across the whole of Hertfordshire. Whilst overall programme performance provides an indication of success, analysing delivery at district and borough level provides additional insight into how the programme has responded to differing local economies, business communities and patterns of demand.

It is important to recognise that a universal business support programme should not necessarily be expected to generate identical outputs in every locality. Hertfordshire's districts differ significantly in terms of population size, business density, economic structure, commuting patterns, deprivation and entrepreneurial activity. Variation in programme outputs should therefore be interpreted within this wider context rather than viewed simply as an indicator of stronger or weaker delivery.

This chapter considers the overall geographic distribution of activity before examining the factors that may explain local variation and the implications for future commissioning.

8.2 OVERALL DISTRIBUTION OF ACTIVITY

Performance data demonstrates that Get Enterprising has achieved comprehensive county-wide coverage throughout the evaluation period. Businesses and prospective entrepreneurs have accessed support in every district and borough, with activity distributed across the county rather than concentrated within a small number of locations.

Across the three-year evaluation period, the programme supported 796 businesses through intensive one-to-one support and assisted 717 prospective entrepreneurs, resulting in 490 business starts and 636 jobs created across Hertfordshire. In addition, more than 200 referrals were made to complementary business support services, demonstrating that the programme has operated as an important gateway into the wider business support ecosystem.

Whilst the overall pattern of activity varies between districts, no area appears absent from programme delivery. This reflects one of the strengths of the current delivery model, namely its ability to provide a genuinely county-wide service whilst allowing support to respond to differing levels of local demand.

The distribution of activity also suggests that delivery has generally reflected the diverse characteristics of Hertfordshire's local economies rather than following a uniform allocation of resources. Some variation should therefore be regarded as both expected and appropriate within a demand-led enterprise support programme.

8.3 DISTRIBUTION OF BUSINESS STARTS AND OUTCOMES

Business starts and employment outcomes provide one indication of how entrepreneurial activity varies across Hertfordshire.

Stevenage recorded the highest number of business starts (110) and jobs created (151), representing a particularly strong concentration of enterprise activity during the evaluation period. North Hertfordshire, East Hertfordshire, Watford and Dacorum also generated consistently high levels of business creation and employment outcomes, reflecting sustained engagement with the programme and healthy levels of entrepreneurial demand.

At the other end of the spectrum, Three Rivers recorded comparatively lower activity across most measures, whilst Broxbourne and Welwyn Hatfield also generated fewer business starts than several neighbouring districts.

However, these differences should be interpreted cautiously. The evaluation found no evidence that lower output levels necessarily reflect poorer programme performance. Rather, they are likely to be influenced by wider structural factors including differences in population, business stock, local labour markets, patterns of self-employment and levels of entrepreneurial demand.

Similarly, there is no simple relationship between the number of businesses receiving support and the number of businesses subsequently starting to trade. For example, St Albans recorded one of the highest levels of intensive business support but comparatively fewer business starts than some other districts. Stakeholder consultation suggests that this may reflect the differing characteristics of businesses entering the programme, with some entrepreneurs requiring longer periods of preparation before formally establishing their businesses.

Overall, the district data reinforces the wider evaluation finding that business development is rarely linear and that programme success cannot be judged solely through business start numbers.

8.4 COMPARATIVE PERFORMANCE ACROSS DISTRICTS

Although every district has benefited from the programme, several distinct delivery patterns emerge.

Stevenage represents the most notable concentration of activity across several indicators, including business starts, employment creation and overall programme engagement. This is likely to reflect a combination of strong local demand, an active business support environment and effective local partnership working rather than any single explanatory factor.

North Hertfordshire, Dacorum and Watford also demonstrate consistently strong performance across a broad range of outputs. Rather than excelling in a single measure, these districts display balanced levels of engagement throughout the enterprise journey, including pre-start support, intensive business advice and employment outcomes.

East Hertfordshire similarly performs strongly, particularly in relation to business starts and jobs created, suggesting that businesses supported within the district are progressing successfully through the early stages of business development.

By contrast, Three Rivers consistently records lower levels of activity across most programme measures. Given the district's relatively affluent economic profile, high levels of employment and lower reliance on publicly funded business support, this finding is not unexpected. Stakeholder consultation also highlighted that local demand for early-stage enterprise support may differ from other parts of the county, whilst previous funding arrangements have varied between districts.

Elsewhere, districts such as Broxbourne, Hertsmere and Welwyn Hatfield demonstrate steady levels of engagement without exhibiting particularly high or particularly low performance across individual indicators. Collectively, these results suggest that the programme has maintained a balanced county-wide presence whilst responding to differing levels of demand.

Importantly, no district appears to be systematically underserved. Rather than identifying geographic gaps in delivery, the data illustrates the diversity of entrepreneurial activity across Hertfordshire.

8.5 UNDERSTANDING GEOGRAPHIC VARIATION

The evaluation found that geographic variation is influenced by a range of factors extending beyond programme delivery itself.

Firstly, districts differ significantly in terms of population size and business base. Areas with larger populations and greater numbers of micro-businesses would naturally be expected to generate higher demand for enterprise support than smaller districts.

Secondly, economic characteristics vary considerably across Hertfordshire. Differences in employment patterns, average earnings, commuting behaviour and the prevalence of self-employment all influence the likelihood that individuals seek support to establish new businesses.

Thirdly, stakeholder consultation highlighted the importance of local partnerships and referral networks. Active engagement with local authorities, voluntary organisations and business networks can influence awareness of available support and the extent to which prospective entrepreneurs are encouraged to access the programme.

The evaluation also recognises that external funding arrangements have evolved during the life of the programme, including the introduction of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) activity in some areas. Whilst this has enabled additional support to be delivered, the district-level analysis presented within this report considers the combined programme as experienced by businesses, rather than attempting to distinguish between individual funding sources.

Taken together, these factors suggest that differences between districts should not be interpreted as evidence of inconsistent delivery. Instead, they illustrate the importance of maintaining a flexible programme capable of responding to differing local circumstances whilst providing a consistent standard of support across the county.

8.6 ACCESSIBILITY AND COUNTY-WIDE COVERAGE

One of the clearest findings emerging from the evaluation is that Get Enterprising has maintained a genuinely county-wide service.

The combination of one-to-one advice, workshops, webinars and online delivery has enabled businesses to access support irrespective of location. Stakeholder consultation also identified the flexibility of delivery as one of the programme's strengths, particularly following the increased use of digital engagement methods developed during recent years.

The geographic spread of programme activity provides further evidence that businesses from every district have been able to access support. Participation levels inevitably vary, but the evaluation found no indication that the model has created significant barriers to access for specific parts of the county.

This represents an important strength within the context of Hertfordshire's diverse geography, where businesses range from urban centres such as Stevenage and Watford to more rural communities across East Hertfordshire and North Hertfordshire.

Future commissioning should therefore seek to preserve the flexibility and accessibility that characterise the current delivery model whilst continuing to monitor participation patterns to ensure that emerging gaps in provision are identified at an early stage.

8.7 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE DELIVERY

The district analysis provides several important considerations for future commissioning.

Firstly, the evidence does not support adopting identical output expectations for every district. Differences in local economies, entrepreneurial demand and business demographics mean that variation should be anticipated within a successful county-wide programme.

Secondly, commissioners should continue to focus on ensuring equitable access rather than equal outputs. The objective should be that businesses across Hertfordshire are able to access high-quality support appropriate to their needs, recognising that demand and outcomes will naturally vary between locations.

Thirdly, district-level performance information should increasingly be used as an intelligence tool rather than simply a monitoring exercise. Understanding why demand differs between districts may help identify opportunities for targeted marketing, stronger local partnerships or additional specialist provision where justified by local circumstances.

Finally, the analysis reinforces the importance of retaining flexibility within future delivery arrangements. A programme capable of responding to local demand whilst maintaining consistent quality across the county is likely to provide greater long-term value than one driven by rigid geographic output targets.

8.8 SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

The evaluation concludes that Get Enterprising has achieved effective county-wide coverage and has successfully supported businesses and prospective entrepreneurs across every district and borough of Hertfordshire.

Although output levels vary geographically, the evidence suggests that these differences primarily reflect local economic conditions, business characteristics and patterns of entrepreneurial demand rather than inconsistencies in programme delivery. The programme has demonstrated the flexibility necessary to respond to these differing local circumstances whilst maintaining a consistent offer across the county.

Rather than identifying significant geographic inequalities, the district analysis highlights the importance of maintaining a universal, accessible enterprise support service that can respond intelligently to local needs. Future commissioning should therefore continue to monitor geographic patterns of demand and participation, whilst recognising that successful delivery is more appropriately measured through equitable access, responsive support and positive business outcomes than through identical levels of activity in every district.

9. ALIGNMENT WITH THE HERTFORDSHIRE ECONOMIC STRATEGY

9.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the principal objectives of this evaluation is to assess the extent to which Get Enterprising contributes to the ambitions set out within the Hertfordshire Economic Strategy. Whilst the programme was originally designed to provide enterprise support to individuals considering self-employment and businesses in their early years of trading, the strategic context has evolved considerably since the current contract commenced. The Economic Strategy places greater emphasis on productivity, innovation, digital adoption, inclusive growth and the development of a resilient economy capable of responding to changing economic conditions.

Against this backdrop, it is important to consider not only whether Get Enterprising is delivering its contractual outputs, but whether it continues to represent an appropriate intervention within Hertfordshire's wider economic development framework.

Evidence gathered through this evaluation suggests that the programme remains strongly aligned with many of the strategic priorities identified within the Economic Strategy. However, the nature of that contribution varies. In some areas, such as enterprise creation and inclusive entrepreneurship, alignment is direct and explicit. In others, including productivity, innovation and business growth, the programme makes a more indirect contribution by building the capabilities and resilience of businesses during their formative stages.

The chapter therefore considers the extent to which the current service contributes to each of the principal themes of the Economic Strategy and identifies opportunities to strengthen that contribution within any future commissioning arrangements.

9.2 CONTRIBUTION TO PRODUCTIVITY AND BUSINESS RESILIENCE

The Economic Strategy identifies productivity improvement as one of Hertfordshire's principal economic challenges. Whilst the county benefits from high employment and a diverse business base, productivity growth has slowed in recent years and many smaller businesses continue to face pressures arising from inflation, labour shortages, rising operating costs and wider economic uncertainty.

Get Enterprising is not designed as a productivity programme in the traditional sense. Its primary purpose is to support individuals into business and help young businesses establish sustainable foundations. Nevertheless, evidence gathered through this evaluation suggests that the programme makes an important indirect contribution to productivity by improving business capability, reducing business failure and encouraging more effective business practices.

Both stakeholder consultation and client feedback consistently highlighted the value of practical business advice in helping entrepreneurs make informed decisions during the critical early stages of business development. Rather than focusing solely on increasing turnover or employment, advisers frequently support businesses to develop robust business plans, improve financial management, strengthen marketing activity and build confidence in decision-making.

These interventions may not generate immediate productivity gains that are readily measurable through contractual outputs, but they help establish stronger and more resilient businesses capable of contributing to the county's economy over the longer term.

Stakeholders also observed that the economic environment facing new businesses has become significantly more challenging than when the previous evaluation was undertaken. Rising costs, economic uncertainty and changing consumer behaviour mean that many businesses now require support to survive and consolidate before they are able to pursue growth. Consequently, advisers reported placing greater emphasis on resilience, financial planning and sustainable development than might previously have been the case.

Viewed in this context, Get Enterprising contributes to the Economic Strategy not simply by increasing the number of business starts, but by improving the likelihood that those businesses develop sustainable operating models capable of generating future employment and economic value.

9.3 DIGITAL CAPABILITY, TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The Economic Strategy identifies digital capability and technology adoption as increasingly important drivers of business competitiveness. This reflects the growing importance of digital marketing, e-commerce, automation and the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as practical business tools rather than specialist technologies.

Evidence from across the evaluation suggests that business demand has evolved considerably during the current contract period. Programme monitoring, stakeholder interviews and client feedback all indicate increasing demand for support relating to digital marketing, online trading, technology adoption and AI. AI roadshows introduced during the programme attracted particularly strong attendance and generated requests for more advanced follow-on support, suggesting that businesses increasingly recognise AI as a practical means of improving efficiency and competitiveness rather than simply an emerging technology.

Similarly, both the independent client survey and wider customer feedback identified continuing demand for support covering digital marketing, online promotion and AI tools. Comparable findings were also evident within wider enterprise support activity across the county, reinforcing the view that these are becoming mainstream business support needs rather than specialist areas of interest.

The programme has responded positively by adapting workshop content and introducing new topics as demand has evolved. This demonstrates an important strength of the current delivery model, namely its ability to respond relatively quickly to changing business needs without requiring significant structural change.

However, the pace of technological development suggests that future commissioning arrangements may need to place greater emphasis on maintaining flexibility within programme content. Rather than defining specific subjects over the lifetime of a contract, consideration could be given to allowing greater scope for providers to introduce new topics in response to emerging technologies and changing business practices.

9.4 INNOVATION AND COMMERCIALISATION

Innovation forms a central theme within the Hertfordshire Economic Strategy, particularly through strengthening links between research, knowledge-intensive industries and commercial enterprise.

Get Enterprising does not primarily operate within this part of the innovation ecosystem. Its focus is supporting businesses at the earliest stages of development, many of which are lifestyle businesses or micro-enterprises operating in local markets. Consequently, the programme should not be expected to deliver significant innovation outputs in the same way as specialist innovation or scale-up programmes.

Nevertheless, stakeholder consultation identified several ways in which the programme contributes to innovation indirectly. By encouraging entrepreneurial activity, supporting new business formation and improving commercial awareness, the programme increases the number of businesses entering the wider support ecosystem. For some businesses, this represents the first stage in a longer journey that may subsequently involve specialist innovation support, university collaboration or Growth Hub services.

Evidence also suggests that innovation should be interpreted more broadly than research and development alone. Many businesses supported through Get Enterprising demonstrate innovation through new service models, digital delivery, creative business models and the adoption of new technologies. Supporting these forms of innovation remains consistent with the wider ambitions of the Economic Strategy, even where businesses operate at relatively modest scale.

9.5 SUPPORT FOR PRIORITY SECTORS

The Economic Strategy identifies several priority sectors that are expected to drive future economic growth within Hertfordshire.

Performance data demonstrates that Get Enterprising supports businesses across a broad range of sectors, with particularly strong representation from health and wellbeing, business services and the creative industries. These sectors correspond well with areas identified within the Economic Strategy and reflect wider changes in the structure of the county's economy.

At the same time, the programme remains intentionally open to businesses across all sectors. Stakeholders generally viewed this universal approach positively, recognising that it enables entrepreneurship to emerge wherever opportunities exist rather than restricting support to predetermined sectors.

The evaluation therefore found no evidence that the programme should become exclusively targeted towards priority sectors. However, there may be opportunities for future commissioning arrangements to encourage additional specialist provision where businesses operating within strategic sectors require more tailored support or stronger progression pathways into sector-specific growth programmes.

9.6 INCLUSIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

One of the clearest areas of alignment between Get Enterprising and the Economic Strategy relates to inclusive entrepreneurship.

The programme is intentionally designed to provide accessible support to individuals considering self-employment regardless of previous business experience. Evidence gathered throughout the evaluation suggests that advisers regularly support individuals who may have limited commercial experience, have experienced redundancy, are returning to work following caring responsibilities or are seeking to convert part-time activities into sustainable businesses.

Stakeholders consistently emphasised that many clients require confidence-building alongside technical business advice. In this respect, the programme generates benefits extending beyond traditional economic outputs by helping individuals participate in economic activity who might otherwise lack the confidence or knowledge to establish a business.

Whilst further improvements to diversity monitoring would strengthen understanding of who benefits from the programme, the available evidence indicates that Get Enterprising makes a positive contribution towards widening participation in entrepreneurship and supporting more inclusive economic growth.

9.7 BUSINESS GROWTH, SCALING AND SUSTAINABILITY

Perhaps the most significant strategic question identified during the evaluation concerns the relationship between enterprise support and business growth.

The current service primarily supports businesses during their earliest stages of development. For many businesses this represents an appropriate intervention, enabling them to establish sustainable foundations before pursuing expansion. However, stakeholder interviews identified considerable variation in the pace at which businesses mature. Some require extended periods of support before they are ready for growth-focused interventions, whilst others are capable of progressing much more rapidly through the support ecosystem.

This finding suggests that progression should increasingly be determined by business readiness rather than business age alone. It also provides context for the relatively low number of referrals to the Hertfordshire Growth Hub observed during the evaluation period. Rather than indicating weaknesses in partnership working, evidence consistently suggests that many businesses simply remain at an earlier stage of development for longer than originally anticipated.

The evaluation also found evidence that economic conditions have altered business behaviour. Businesses are taking longer to establish, placing greater emphasis on resilience and often seeking to consolidate before pursuing expansion. This reinforces the continuing importance of early-stage enterprise support whilst highlighting opportunities to strengthen progression arrangements for businesses demonstrating stronger growth potential.

9.8 OVERALL STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Overall, the evaluation finds that Get Enterprising remains well aligned with the strategic direction established by the Hertfordshire Economic Strategy.

Its strongest contribution lies in supporting entrepreneurship, improving business resilience, widening participation in enterprise and developing the capabilities required for long-term business success. Whilst the programme is not intended to deliver all aspects of the Economic Strategy directly, it provides an important foundation upon which other business support interventions can build.

The evaluation also suggests that the programme has demonstrated an ability to evolve in response to changing business needs, particularly through greater emphasis on digital capability, AI and practical business resilience. This adaptability represents an important strength that should be retained within any future commissioning arrangements.

Looking ahead, opportunities exist to strengthen strategic alignment further through enhanced progression pathways, improved integration with the wider business support ecosystem and a performance framework that places greater emphasis on long-term business development alongside traditional output measures.

Taken together, the evidence indicates that Get Enterprising continues to represent a strategically relevant intervention within Hertfordshire's business support landscape. The question for future commissioning is therefore less whether the service should continue and more how it should evolve to maximise its contribution to the county's longer-term economic ambitions.

10. ASSESSING THE CURRENT SERVICE MODEL

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to assess whether the current Get Enterprising delivery model remains appropriate for Hertfordshire's future business support needs. Whilst previous chapters have considered programme performance, client experiences and strategic alignment, this chapter brings together that evidence to examine how the service is currently designed and whether any aspects should evolve.

The current model has remained broadly consistent throughout the contract period. It combines one-to-one business advice with workshops, webinars, specialist support and referrals, focusing primarily on individuals considering self-employment and businesses during their earliest years of trading. The programme is intentionally universal, providing support across all sectors and districts whilst allowing advisers flexibility to tailor support according to individual business needs.

Overall, the evaluation found broad stakeholder support for the existing model. Few consultees advocated fundamental redesign, and most considered the programme to provide an important component of Hertfordshire's business support ecosystem. Nevertheless, the evaluation also identified opportunities to refine elements of the model in response to changing economic conditions, evolving client expectations and the strategic ambitions of Hertfordshire Futures.

10.2 IS THE CURRENT SCOPE APPROPRIATE?

One of the principal questions explored during the evaluation was whether Get Enterprising continues to focus on the right client group.

Performance data demonstrates that the programme continues to engage large numbers of aspiring entrepreneurs and young businesses, whilst stakeholder consultation consistently identified an ongoing need for accessible early-stage business support. Despite relatively high levels of employment within Hertfordshire, consultees noted that establishing a sustainable business has become increasingly challenging. Rising operating costs, inflation, changing consumer behaviour and greater economic uncertainty mean that many individuals require more support before businesses become commercially viable.

Importantly, there was little evidence that stakeholders wished to narrow the overall scope of the programme. Rather than questioning who should receive support, discussion focused on ensuring that the service remains sufficiently flexible to respond to businesses with differing levels of experience, ambition and readiness.

The evaluation therefore concludes that the existing scope remains appropriate. However, future commissioning may benefit from recognising that businesses entering the programme are increasingly diverse, ranging from complete beginners requiring intensive support to experienced professionals establishing new commercial ventures. A single, linear support pathway is therefore unlikely to reflect the realities of client demand.

10.3 START-UP VERSUS EARLY-STAGE SUPPORT

The current programme supports both individuals preparing to establish a business and businesses during their first years of trading. Stakeholders generally regarded this as one of the programme's strengths, recognising that the transition from pre-start to trading is rarely straightforward and that businesses often continue to require significant support after formal start-up.

Evidence gathered throughout the evaluation suggests that businesses now take longer to become established than during previous evaluation periods. Stakeholders reported that economic uncertainty has lengthened the period between initial business planning and sustainable trading, with many clients requiring ongoing guidance before they are ready to pursue growth opportunities.

At the same time, advisers described increasing variation in client journeys. Some businesses progress rapidly through the programme, whilst others require repeated interventions over a much longer period. This finding supports a more flexible interpretation of client progression, based on business readiness rather than elapsed time since trading commenced.

Consequently, the evaluation found no evidence that support should be restricted solely to pre-start businesses. Continuing to provide support during the earliest stages of trading remains an important element of the programme and contributes to improved business resilience during what is often the highest-risk phase of business development.

10.4 UNIVERSAL ACCESS VERSUS TARGETED SUPPORT

The evaluation considered whether future delivery should become more targeted towards particular sectors, business types or growth ambitions.

Overall, stakeholders expressed strong support for retaining a universal entry point into the service. Open access enables the programme to support entrepreneurship wherever opportunities emerge and avoids creating barriers for individuals who may not initially identify with more specialised business support programmes. This approach is also consistent with the programme's contribution to inclusive entrepreneurship, as discussed in Chapter 9.

However, universal access does not necessarily require universal delivery. Evidence suggests that businesses have increasingly diverse needs and aspirations. Some seek to establish sustainable lifestyle businesses, whilst others have clear ambitions to innovate, recruit staff and grow rapidly.

Similarly, businesses demonstrate differing levels of commercial experience and confidence irrespective of their age.

Rather than restricting eligibility, the evaluation suggests greater differentiation within the service itself. Future models could retain an open point of access whilst offering more tailored pathways reflecting business maturity, ambition and support needs. Such an approach would maintain accessibility whilst improving the alignment between support provided and individual business circumstances.

10.5 EFFECTIVENESS OF ADVICE, MENTORING AND WORKSHOPS

Perhaps the strongest finding emerging from the evaluation concerns the quality and perceived value of the support provided.

Client feedback consistently highlighted the value of experienced advisers, practical advice and the opportunity to discuss business challenges with individuals possessing genuine commercial experience. One-to-one support was particularly valued for helping businesses build confidence, test ideas and translate business concepts into practical actions.

Stakeholders similarly regarded adviser expertise as one of the programme's principal strengths. Rather than simply transferring information, advisers were seen as helping businesses navigate uncertainty, identify appropriate next steps and access wider support where appropriate.

Workshops and webinars also received positive feedback, particularly where they addressed practical topics such as digital marketing, AI and business planning. The popularity of AI-focused events illustrates the programme's ability to adapt content in response to changing business needs.

Nevertheless, evidence also suggests that businesses increasingly expect flexible methods of engagement. Short webinars, recorded content and targeted workshops appear particularly attractive to time-constrained business owners. Future delivery models may therefore benefit from maintaining a blended approach, combining personalised advice with a wider range of flexible learning opportunities.

The evidence does not suggest replacing one-to-one advice with digital delivery. Rather, digital approaches appear most effective when complementing personalised business support.

10.6 SUPPORT INTENSITY AND DURATION

One of the most significant issues considered during the evaluation concerns the relationship between contractual support hours and actual client needs.

The current contract specifies minimum levels of adviser engagement before businesses contribute towards contractual outputs. Whilst these measures provide consistency for performance monitoring, stakeholder discussions identified questions regarding whether fixed hourly thresholds always reflect the most effective support model.

Programme managers reported that some businesses naturally achieve their objectives within fewer adviser hours, whilst others require substantially more intensive support. In some cases, advisers considered themselves to be extending engagement primarily to satisfy contractual reporting requirements rather than because additional support generated further value. Conversely, businesses facing more complex challenges may require longer periods of engagement than contractual assumptions anticipate.

The evaluation does not conclude that adviser hours should cease to be monitored. However, it does suggest that future commissioning arrangements should place greater emphasis on the appropriateness and effectiveness of support rather than assuming that identical levels of engagement are required for every client.

A more flexible approach may better reflect the differing characteristics of modern entrepreneurs whilst maintaining accountability for public investment.

10.7 PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND GRADUATION TO GROWTH SUPPORT

The relationship between Get Enterprising and the wider business support ecosystem emerged as one of the most important strategic issues considered during the evaluation.

Performance data demonstrates relatively low numbers of referrals to the Hertfordshire Growth Hub compared with other contractual measures. However, stakeholder interviews consistently suggested that this should not be interpreted as evidence of ineffective partnership working. Rather, many businesses remain focused on establishing viable trading models before they are ready to access specialist growth support.

The evaluation therefore supports the view that progression should be determined primarily by business readiness rather than contractual expectations or business age. Some businesses may be ready for specialist growth support relatively quickly, whilst others benefit from longer engagement within the enterprise support programme.

At the same time, opportunities exist to strengthen progression arrangements. Stakeholders identified potential benefits from improved referral feedback, greater visibility of client journeys across organisations and more integrated information management systems. Such developments would provide commissioners with greater confidence that businesses are progressing appropriately through the support ecosystem whilst reducing the risk of duplication.

10.8 FUTURE DEMAND AND EMERGING NEEDS

Evidence gathered throughout the evaluation indicates that business support demand continues to evolve.

Traditional topics such as business planning, finance and marketing remain important. However, businesses increasingly require support relating to digital capability, AI, customer acquisition, financial resilience and practical application of technology. The rapid uptake of AI events provides one example of the programme's ability to respond to emerging demand.

There is also growing evidence that business owners value support that is timely and responsive rather than delivered through predetermined programmes. Several consultees suggested that businesses increasingly seek shorter interventions, targeted advice and the opportunity to re-engage with advisers as new challenges emerge.

This suggests that future demand is likely to become more dynamic rather than more extensive.

Successful programmes will therefore need sufficient flexibility to adapt content, delivery methods and support pathways as business needs continue to evolve.

10.9 WHAT SHOULD CHANGE?

Perhaps the most striking finding from the evaluation is that relatively few stakeholders advocated major structural change to Get Enterprising.

Instead, discussion consistently focused upon refinement rather than redesign.

Evidence suggests that the core strengths of the current model should be retained. These include experienced advisers, personalised support, accessible entry routes, practical workshops and close links with local partners.

However, several areas for development emerged consistently across multiple evidence sources.

Firstly, greater flexibility in support pathways would better reflect differing business journeys and reduce reliance upon fixed assumptions regarding support intensity.

Secondly, progression between enterprise support and growth support could be strengthened through improved information sharing and clearer referral processes.

Thirdly, future programme content should continue evolving to reflect emerging business needs, particularly in areas such as AI, digital capability and business resilience.

Finally, future commissioning may benefit from placing greater emphasis upon strategic outcomes rather than contractual processes, allowing providers greater flexibility in how they achieve agreed objectives whilst maintaining appropriate accountability for public investment.

10.10 OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT MODEL

Taken together, the evidence indicates that the current Get Enterprising model remains fundamentally sound.

The programme continues to address a clear market need, enjoys strong stakeholder support and delivers positive experiences for participating businesses. Importantly, the evaluation found little appetite for wholesale redesign.

Instead, the evidence points towards evolutionary change. The underlying principles of accessible, personalised enterprise support remain appropriate, but the mechanisms through which support is delivered should continue adapting to reflect changing business needs, technological developments and the wider ambitions of Hertfordshire Futures.

The strongest message emerging from the evaluation is therefore not that Get Enterprising requires a different purpose, but that it requires greater flexibility. Businesses increasingly follow varied pathways into entrepreneurship, develop at different rates and require differing forms of support throughout their journey. Future commissioning arrangements should seek to accommodate this diversity whilst preserving the qualities that businesses and stakeholders consistently value.

Ultimately, the evaluation concludes that Get Enterprising remains an effective foundation for Hertfordshire's enterprise support offer. The challenge for future commissioning is not whether the model should continue, but how it can evolve to maximise its strategic contribution within an increasingly integrated and responsive business support ecosystem.

11. FUTURE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Performance measurement is central to ensuring that publicly funded business support programmes deliver value for money and contribute to wider economic objectives. Throughout the current contract,

Get Enterprising has been monitored against a series of contractual outputs and outcomes, including the number of businesses supported, business starts, jobs created, referrals and customer satisfaction.

The evaluation found that this framework has generally supported effective contract management and provided a clear basis for monitoring delivery. Overall programme performance has been strong, with most contractual targets consistently achieved or exceeded.

However, evidence gathered throughout the evaluation suggests that the current framework does not fully capture the wider contribution made by the programme, nor does it always reflect the increasingly diverse ways in which businesses engage with support.

Stakeholders also recognised that the purpose of performance management extends beyond demonstrating contractual compliance. A future framework should help commissioners understand whether the programme is supporting the right businesses, delivering appropriate interventions, contributing to wider economic priorities and operating effectively within Hertfordshire's business support ecosystem.

The evaluation therefore concludes that future performance measurement should build upon the strengths of the current framework whilst placing greater emphasis on strategic outcomes, business progression and service quality.

11.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE CURRENT FRAMEWORK

The existing performance framework is primarily based upon quantitative delivery measures.

These provide an objective means of monitoring programme activity and have enabled Hertfordshire Futures to assess delivery against contractual commitments throughout the life of the programme.

However, evidence gathered during stakeholder consultation identified several limitations.

Firstly, contractual measures inevitably simplify what is often a highly individual business development journey. Businesses progress at different rates and require differing levels of support depending upon their previous experience, sector, commercial ambition and wider economic circumstances. Consequently, identical measures do not always reflect equivalent levels of impact.

Secondly, some measures may unintentionally influence delivery behaviour. The evaluation heard examples where adviser engagement was extended primarily to satisfy minimum hour requirements rather than because additional support was necessarily required. Whilst there is no evidence that this adversely affected client experience, it suggests that future frameworks should focus on the appropriateness of support rather than simply its duration.

Thirdly, the framework currently captures relatively little information about what happens after businesses leave the programme. Outputs such as business starts and jobs created remain important, but they provide only a partial picture of longer-term business development.

Finally, stakeholders noted that current reporting arrangements provide limited visibility of business progression across the wider support ecosystem. As a result, commissioners cannot always determine whether businesses subsequently access specialist growth support or how earlier interventions contribute to longer-term economic outcomes.

These limitations do not undermine the value of the existing framework. Rather, they suggest opportunities to broaden the range of evidence used to assess programme success.

11.3 MEASURING CLIENT PROGRESSION

One of the strongest themes emerging from the evaluation is the importance of measuring business progression rather than simply programme activity.

Throughout the evaluation, stakeholders emphasised that businesses rarely develop through a simple linear journey. Some establish viable trading businesses relatively quickly, whilst others require longer periods of support before they are ready for more specialised interventions. Equally, not every business seeks rapid growth. Many entrepreneurs establish sustainable lifestyle businesses that nevertheless contribute positively to local employment, community resilience and the wider economy.

Future performance frameworks should therefore seek to understand how businesses develop over time rather than focusing solely upon the point at which they complete programme support.

Potential measures could include progression to specialist growth support, continued trading after defined periods, business confidence, adoption of improved business practices and evidence that businesses are better prepared for future growth.

Such measures would provide commissioners with a richer understanding of programme impact whilst recognising that successful outcomes differ between businesses.

11.4 MEASURING SERVICE QUALITY

Client satisfaction has consistently exceeded contractual expectations and remains an important indicator of service quality. However, satisfaction alone provides only a partial assessment of programme effectiveness.

The evaluation suggests that future quality measures should place greater emphasis upon the experience of receiving support and the extent to which advice enables businesses to make informed decisions.

Qualitative evidence collected through this evaluation indicates that businesses particularly value adviser expertise, practical guidance, personalised support and the confidence gained through engagement with the programme. These characteristics represent important elements of service quality that are not fully reflected through satisfaction scores alone.

Future evaluation activity could therefore continue combining quantitative satisfaction measures with periodic qualitative research to understand how businesses experience the service and how those experiences influence subsequent business development.

This approach would also provide commissioners with greater insight into emerging business needs and opportunities for continuous improvement.

11.5 MEASURING PARTNERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

The evaluation found that partnership working represents one of the programme's principal strengths. Stakeholders consistently described positive relationships between Get Enterprising and the wider business support ecosystem, whilst also identifying opportunities to strengthen referral processes and information sharing.

Current performance measures focus primarily upon referral volumes. Whilst these remain useful indicators, they provide only limited insight into the effectiveness of partnership working. Future frameworks could therefore consider a broader range of partnership measures.

These might include:

- the proportion of referrals successfully engaging with onward support
- feedback from referral partners
- evidence of joint delivery activity
- client progression across multiple programmes
- effectiveness of information sharing between organisations.

Such measures would recognise that successful partnership working depends not simply upon the number of referrals made, but upon whether businesses receive appropriate support throughout their development journey.

11.6 MEASURING STRATEGIC CONTRIBUTION

The Hertfordshire Economic Strategy places increasing emphasis on productivity, innovation, digital capability, inclusive growth and business resilience. As discussed in Chapter 9, Get Enterprising contributes to these ambitions in ways that extend beyond traditional contractual outputs.

Future performance frameworks should therefore seek to demonstrate how enterprise support contributes to wider strategic objectives rather than measuring activity in isolation.

Not all strategic outcomes will lend themselves to simple numerical indicators. However, commissioners could reasonably expect future providers to demonstrate how programme activity contributes towards themes including:

- improving business resilience
- increasing digital capability and technology adoption
- supporting inclusive entrepreneurship
- encouraging progression through the business support ecosystem
- developing stronger foundations for sustainable business growth.

This does not imply replacing established contractual measures. Rather, strategic indicators should complement operational performance measures, providing commissioners with greater confidence that the programme continues to support Hertfordshire's wider economic ambitions.

11.7 OPTIONS FOR A FUTURE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

Drawing together the evidence presented throughout this evaluation, a future performance framework should balance accountability with flexibility.

Core contractual outputs, including business starts, businesses supported, jobs created and customer satisfaction, remain important measures of programme delivery and should continue to form part of future contracts.

However, these should be supported by a broader range of measures reflecting how businesses develop and how the programme contributes to wider economic objectives.

A future framework could therefore be structured around four complementary dimensions.

Delivery Performance

Monitoring programme activity through contractual outputs, financial performance and service standards.

Client Outcomes

Assessing changes experienced by businesses, including confidence, capability, resilience, business development and progression.

Strategic Contribution

Demonstrating alignment with the Hertfordshire Economic Strategy through evidence relating to productivity, digital capability, inclusive entrepreneurship and sustainable business growth.

Partnership and Ecosystem Effectiveness

Measuring how effectively businesses move between complementary services and the extent to which the wider business support ecosystem operates as an integrated offer.

This balanced approach would provide commissioners with a more comprehensive understanding of programme performance whilst avoiding excessive reliance upon any single performance measure.

11.8 SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

The evaluation concludes that the current performance framework has supported effective contract management and has enabled Hertfordshire Futures to monitor delivery with confidence.

Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that future commissioning arrangements present an opportunity to move beyond measuring activity alone towards assessing strategic contribution and long-term business development.

Businesses increasingly follow diverse development pathways, require differing forms of support and contribute to Hertfordshire's economy in different ways. A future performance framework should therefore recognise these differences whilst maintaining clear accountability for public investment.

Taken together, the evaluation suggests that future success should be judged not only by how many businesses receive support, but by whether the right businesses receive the right support at the right time, whether they progress appropriately through Hertfordshire's business support ecosystem and whether the programme contributes meaningfully to the county's long-term economic ambitions.

12. CONCLUSIONS

12.1 OVERALL ASSESSMENT

This evaluation has examined the effectiveness, impact and continuing strategic relevance of Get Enterprising as Hertfordshire Futures' dedicated enterprise support programme.

Drawing upon programme performance data, stakeholder consultation, business feedback and documentary evidence, the evaluation concludes that Get Enterprising remains an effective intervention that continues to address a clear and demonstrable market need.

The programme has consistently achieved strong performance throughout the evaluation period, exceeding the majority of contractual output and outcome targets whilst maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction and stakeholder confidence. Businesses across every district and borough have accessed support, resulting in significant numbers of new business starts, employment opportunities and referrals into the wider business support ecosystem.

More importantly, the evidence demonstrates that the programme has adapted positively to changing economic conditions, evolving business needs and emerging technologies whilst retaining the personalised support that businesses consistently value.

The evaluation identified relatively few operational weaknesses in the delivery of the programme.

Stakeholders consistently described Get Enterprising as a well-managed, responsive and professionally delivered service, and there is no evidence to suggest that the quality of delivery has diminished during the contract period. Indeed, many of the strengths identified in the previous evaluation remain evident today.

The principal findings emerging from this evaluation are therefore strategic rather than operational.

The evidence suggests that the programme itself continues to perform well, but that future commissioning arrangements should evolve to reflect changes in the economic environment, business behaviour and the wider business support landscape. Greater emphasis should be placed on business resilience, progression, long-term outcomes and strategic integration rather than solely on contractual outputs.

Overall, the evaluation concludes that Hertfordshire Futures should continue to invest in a dedicated enterprise support programme. The challenge for future commissioning is not whether Get Enterprising should continue, but how the next generation of the programme can build upon its existing strengths whilst improving strategic oversight, ecosystem integration and the measurement of long-term impact.

12.2 IS GET ENTERPRISING STILL THE RIGHT INTERVENTION?

One of the principal objectives of this evaluation was to determine whether Get Enterprising continues to represent an appropriate use of public investment and whether a dedicated enterprise support programme remains necessary within Hertfordshire's wider business support landscape.

The evidence gathered throughout the evaluation provides a clear and consistent answer. Get Enterprising continues to address a genuine market need and remains an appropriate strategic intervention for Hertfordshire Futures.

Demand for the programme has remained consistently strong throughout the evaluation period, with high levels of engagement from both prospective entrepreneurs and early-stage businesses across all ten districts and boroughs. Performance data demonstrates sustained delivery against contractual outputs and outcomes, whilst client feedback and stakeholder consultation consistently highlight the quality of advice, accessibility of the service and value of personalised business support.

Importantly, the evaluation found no evidence that the need for dedicated enterprise support has diminished. If anything, changing economic conditions have reinforced its importance. Stakeholders consistently observed that businesses now require more support to develop sustainable operating models, with many taking longer to progress from initial business idea to commercial viability than when the programme was originally commissioned.

The evaluation also considered whether the balance between pre-start and early-stage support remains appropriate. The evidence suggests that supporting both groups continues to represent the most effective model. Business development rarely follows a linear pathway and many businesses continue to require significant support beyond formal start-up. Restricting the programme solely to pre-start or solely to established businesses would risk creating an unnecessary gap within what is, in reality, a continuous development journey and risk duplication or overlap with the Growth Hub service.

Similarly, the evaluation considered whether enterprise support should be absorbed into the Hertfordshire Growth Hub. Whilst stronger integration between the two services would undoubtedly improve customer journeys, referral pathways and strategic oversight, the evidence does not support replacing a dedicated enterprise programme with a single integrated service. Enterprise support and growth support serve different client groups, address different business needs and require different types of adviser expertise. The evaluation therefore supports retaining a dedicated county-wide enterprise support programme whilst strengthening progression into wider business growth services.

The evaluation therefore concludes that the question facing Hertfordshire Futures is no longer whether Get Enterprising should continue, but how it should evolve to maximise its strategic contribution over the next commissioning period.

12.3 WHERE DOES THE PROGRAMME ADD VALUE?

An important consideration throughout the evaluation has been the extent to which Get Enterprising delivers benefits that would not otherwise occur without Hertfordshire Futures' investment.

The evidence indicates that the programme provides value extending well beyond the achievement of contractual outputs. It delivers a consistent, county-wide enterprise support offer that is accessible across all districts and boroughs, ensuring that aspiring entrepreneurs can access high-quality advice irrespective of location. The programme also provides a coherent gateway into Hertfordshire's wider business support ecosystem, helping businesses access specialist support as their needs evolve.

Client feedback consistently demonstrates that the greatest value lies not simply in the information provided, but in the quality of personalised advice, practical challenge and confidence-building offered by experienced advisers. Stakeholders similarly identified adviser expertise and flexibility as key strengths, particularly in helping businesses navigate increasingly complex economic conditions.

The evaluation also finds that Hertfordshire Futures' investment enables a strategically commissioned service that can evolve alongside county priorities. Throughout the current contract the programme has responded to emerging issues including business resilience, digital capability and Artificial Intelligence, demonstrating an ability to adapt its offer whilst maintaining consistent quality.

Whilst it is possible that some enterprise support would continue to be delivered through other funding streams or organisational activity, the evaluation found no evidence that a comparable county-wide programme, aligned to Hertfordshire Futures' strategic priorities and delivered consistently across all districts, would exist in the absence of public investment. The funding provided by Hertfordshire Futures therefore creates additional value through the scale, consistency, accessibility and strategic alignment of the programme.

The evaluation therefore concludes that continued public investment is justified, not simply because outputs have been achieved, but because Hertfordshire Futures is commissioning an intervention that provides additional economic and strategic value beyond what would be expected through market provision alone.

12.4 WHAT SHOULD CHANGE?

Although the evaluation found broad support for the current delivery model, it also identified several opportunities to strengthen future commissioning.

Firstly, future contracts should place greater emphasis on supporting business resilience and sustainable development alongside business creation. Stakeholders consistently observed that businesses now take longer to establish themselves and often require greater emphasis on financial planning, market testing and commercial resilience before pursuing growth. Future programme design should continue reflecting this changing business environment.

Secondly, future support pathways should increasingly be based on business readiness rather than business age. The evaluation found considerable variation in the pace at which businesses develop and concluded that progression between Get Enterprising and the Hertfordshire Growth Hub should be determined by business maturity, ambition and support needs rather than arbitrary time-based thresholds.

Thirdly, stronger integration across Hertfordshire's business support ecosystem would improve both customer experience and commissioner oversight. Whilst partnership working is generally positive, opportunities exist to strengthen referral feedback, improve visibility of customer journeys and develop a more integrated understanding of how businesses progress between complementary services.

The evaluation also identified opportunities to improve strategic oversight through enhanced management information. The current reliance on separate CRM systems limits Hertfordshire Futures' visibility of live programme activity, customer progression and performance across the wider business support ecosystem.

A more integrated approach to customer data would strengthen contract management, support performance monitoring and provide commissioners with richer intelligence to inform future policy and commissioning decisions.

Similarly, greater prominence should be given to Hertfordshire Futures' role as programme commissioner and funder. Although there is no evidence that current branding arrangements have negatively affected client satisfaction or delivery quality, the evaluation found that many businesses primarily identify the service with Wenta rather than recognising it as part of Hertfordshire Futures' wider business support offer.

Stronger and more consistent branding, supported by closer integration with the Hertfordshire Futures website and digital channels, would reinforce the visibility of public investment, strengthen awareness of the wider support ecosystem and help businesses understand the progression opportunities available beyond the initial enterprise support offer.

Finally, the evaluation concludes that the current performance framework should evolve. Traditional measures relating to business starts, jobs and customer satisfaction remain important and should continue to form part of future contracts. However, these should be complemented by measures that better capture business progression, resilience, long-term outcomes, strategic contribution and the additional value created through public investment.

Importantly, these issues should be viewed primarily as commissioning considerations rather than shortcomings in programme delivery. The evidence consistently demonstrates that the existing provider has delivered the contract effectively. The opportunities identified relate to how the next generation of the programme is specified, managed and evaluated.

12.5 OVERALL CONCLUSION

This evaluation concludes that Get Enterprising remains the right intervention, delivered through a fundamentally sound service model that continues to meet a clear market need across Hertfordshire.

The programme is well regarded by businesses and stakeholders, demonstrates strong contractual performance and continues to align closely with Hertfordshire Futures' strategic objectives. The evaluation found no evidence to support discontinuing the programme, restricting it solely to pre-start or early-stage businesses, or replacing it with an integrated Growth Hub model. Instead, the evidence supports the continued commissioning of a dedicated enterprise support programme as a core component of Hertfordshire's business support ecosystem.

At the same time, the evaluation concludes that future commissioning should place greater emphasis on strategic integration, commissioner visibility and long-term impact. Better data sharing, enhanced CRM integration, clearer branding, improved digital integration, stronger progression pathways and a more sophisticated performance framework would all strengthen Hertfordshire Futures' ability to maximise the return on its investment whilst improving the experience of businesses navigating the wider support ecosystem.

Ultimately, the evidence suggests that the programme has evolved successfully to meet changing business needs, but that the commissioning framework has not evolved at the same pace. The priority for Hertfordshire Futures is therefore not to redesign a programme that is demonstrably working well, but to build upon its established strengths through a commissioning approach that better reflects how businesses now start, develop and grow.

The recommendations presented in the following chapter are intended to support that next phase of development, ensuring that Get Enterprising continues to provide a high-quality, strategically aligned and impactful enterprise support service for the businesses of Hertfordshire.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 INTRODUCTION

The recommendations presented below build directly upon the evidence gathered throughout this evaluation and the conclusions set out in Chapter 12. They are intended to inform the future commissioning and development of enterprise support within Hertfordshire rather than identify corrective actions for the current programme.

Overall, the evaluation found that Get Enterprising remains a well-performing and strategically relevant intervention. Consequently, the recommendations focus primarily on refining and strengthening the existing model rather than proposing fundamental redesign.

13.2 STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Recommendation 1: Continue to commission a dedicated county-wide enterprise support programme.

The evaluation found clear evidence that Get Enterprising continues to address a genuine market need and provides an important entry point into Hertfordshire's business support ecosystem. Demand remains strong, businesses consistently value the service and the programme continues to align closely with the priorities of the Hertfordshire Economic Strategy. Future commissioning should therefore retain a dedicated enterprise support programme rather than seeking to absorb this activity into the Growth Hub or replace it with a more generic business support offer.

Recommendation 2: Retain universal access whilst introducing more differentiated support pathways.

The evaluation found that businesses enter the programme with increasingly diverse levels of experience, ambition and commercial readiness. Future contracts should therefore retain open access whilst enabling providers to tailor support according to business maturity, growth aspirations and individual support needs. This approach will ensure that businesses receive appropriate support without creating unnecessary eligibility barriers.

13.3 SERVICE DELIVERY

Recommendation 3: Place greater emphasis on business readiness and resilience alongside business creation.

The evaluation found that businesses are taking longer to establish sustainable trading models and increasingly require support relating to financial resilience, digital capability and commercial planning before pursuing growth. Future programme specifications should explicitly recognise business resilience as a legitimate and valuable outcome alongside business starts and employment creation.

Recommendation 4: Maintain personalised adviser support as the foundation of the programme whilst continuing to develop flexible delivery methods.

Businesses consistently identified one-to-one adviser support as the most valuable aspect of the programme. Future delivery should continue combining personalised business advice with workshops, webinars, digital resources and emerging technologies, ensuring that support remains accessible whilst responding to changing client expectations.

Recommendation 5: Ensure future programme content remains sufficiently flexible to respond to emerging business needs.

The rapid growth in demand for support relating to Artificial Intelligence, digital marketing and technology adoption demonstrates the importance of maintaining flexibility within programme delivery.

Future contracts should specify desired outcomes rather than prescribing detailed programme content, enabling providers to adapt support as business needs evolve throughout the contract period.

13.4 PARTNERSHIP AND STRATEGIC INTEGRATION

Recommendation 6: Strengthen progression pathways across Hertfordshire's wider business support ecosystem.

Whilst partnership working is generally effective, future commissioning should place greater emphasis on helping businesses progress seamlessly between enterprise support, the Hertfordshire Growth Hub and specialist business support services.

This should include clearer referral pathways, stronger feedback mechanisms between delivery partners and improved visibility of customer journeys across the wider business support landscape.

Recommendation 7: Improve commissioner visibility through enhanced CRM integration, management information and programme branding.

The evaluation identified opportunities to strengthen Hertfordshire Futures' strategic oversight of the programme.

Future commissioning should seek greater integration between customer relationship management systems, enabling commissioners to access more timely management information and develop a clearer understanding of business progression across multiple programmes.

Similarly, greater consistency should be achieved in the way the programme is presented through websites, communications and marketing materials. Whilst businesses clearly value the Wenta brand and delivery model, stronger recognition of Hertfordshire Futures as programme commissioner would reinforce awareness of the wider business support ecosystem and the role of public investment in enabling the service.

13.5 PERFORMANCE AND COMMISSIONING

Recommendation 8: Develop a broader performance framework reflecting long-term business development.

Future contracts should retain core output measures relating to businesses supported, business starts, jobs created and customer satisfaction.

However, these should be complemented by measures capturing business resilience, progression, survival, digital capability, strategic contribution and longer-term business development.

This will provide commissioners with a richer understanding of programme impact whilst supporting more effective contract management.

Recommendation 9: Strengthen the evidence base for measuring additionality, impact and return on investment.

Future evaluations should place greater emphasis on understanding the economic and strategic value created through Hertfordshire Futures' investment. This should include improved baseline information, longitudinal business tracking, evidence of business progression, survival and growth, together with a clearer assessment of the additional value generated through public funding.

Such an approach would strengthen future investment decisions and provide a more comprehensive understanding of programme impact beyond immediate contractual outputs.

Recommendation 10: Adopt a commissioning model that prioritises strategic outcomes alongside operational performance.

The evaluation concludes that future contracts should provide providers with sufficient flexibility to respond to changing business needs whilst maintaining clear accountability for public investment.

Rather than prescribing detailed delivery processes, future commissioning should increasingly focus on the outcomes that Hertfordshire Futures wishes to achieve, supported by robust performance monitoring, strong partnership working and effective strategic oversight. This approach will encourage innovation, enable services to evolve throughout the contract period and ensure that enterprise support continues to contribute effectively to Hertfordshire's wider economic ambitions.

CLOSING STATEMENT

The evaluation demonstrates that Get Enterprising continues to provide a high-quality, accessible and strategically important enterprise support service for Hertfordshire.

The evidence consistently indicates that the programme remains the right intervention, delivered through a sound and well-regarded service model. The principal opportunity for Hertfordshire Futures lies not in redesigning a successful programme, but in strengthening the way it is commissioned, integrated and evaluated.

By building upon the recommendations presented within this report, Hertfordshire Futures can preserve the qualities that businesses and stakeholders consistently value whilst ensuring that future enterprise support remains responsive to changing business needs, better integrated within the wider support ecosystem and more effectively aligned with the county's long-term economic ambitions.

APPENDIX A: CLIENT SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE AND STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

1) GET ENTERPRISING EVALUATION SURVEY

Thank you for taking part in this survey. Hertfordshire Futures is undertaking an independent evaluation of the Get Enterprising service to understand what difference it makes, whether it continues to meet business needs and how it might be improved in future. The survey should take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Your answers will be treated anonymously.

A) ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS

Q1. Which best describes you when you first accessed Get Enterprising?

- Thinking about starting a business
- Started a business but not yet trading
- Trading for less than 12 months
- Trading for 1–3 years
- Trading for more than 3 years
- Other (please specify)

Q2. Which of the following best describes your business?

- Sole trader
- Limited company
- Partnership
- Community Interest Company (CIC) / Social Enterprise
- Other (please specify)

B) EXPERIENCE OF SUPPORT

Q3. Which forms of support did you use? (Select all that apply)

- One-to-one advice
- Workshop or training session
- Webinar
- Specialist advice
- Signposting or referral to another organisation
- Online resources
- Other (please specify)

Q4. Overall, how useful was the support you received?

- Very useful
- Quite useful
- Neither useful nor not useful
- Not very useful
- Not at all useful

Q5. Was the amount of support you received about right?

- Too little support
- About the right amount
- Too much support
- Not sure

Q6. How many support sessions did you have (workshops, advice sessions etc.) (Open text)

C) OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Q7. What difference has Get Enterprising made to you or your business? (Select all that apply)

- Increased my confidence
- Helped me start a business
- Helped me develop a business plan
- Improved my marketing
- Improved my digital skills
- Helped me use AI or new technology
- Helped me attract customers
- Helped me increase sales
- Helped me create employment
- Helped me access other support
- No significant difference yet
- Other (please specify)

Q8. Thinking about the support you received, how much do you agree with the following statement?

"Without Get Enterprising, my business would be less developed than it is today."

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q9. Please briefly describe the most valuable aspect of the support you received. (Open text)

Q10. Looking ahead, where do you hope your business will be in the next 2–5 years?

- I expect to remain a sole trader or lifestyle business of a similar size
- I hope to grow modestly and increase my income or customer base
- I hope to employ staff and expand the business
- I hope to grow significantly into a larger business
- I am not yet sure
- Other (please specify)

Please tell us a little more about your future ambitions for the business. (Open text)

D) FUTURE NEEDS

Q11. What support is most important to you now? (Select up to three)

- Starting a business
- Business planning
- Finance and funding
- Marketing
- Sales
- Digital marketing
- Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Technology and digital tools
- Recruitment and people management
- Business growth
- Sustainability / Net Zero
- Exporting
- Networking
- Other (please specify)

Q12. Before receiving support, were you aware that Get Enterprising is funded by Hertfordshire Futures?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q13. What one change would most improve the Get Enterprising service in future? (Open text)

If you would be willing to take part in a short follow-up interview, please provide your name and contact details;

NAME:

BUSINESS:

E-MAIL ADDRESS

Thank you very much for your responses.

2) STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWEES

Jennifer Condon - Wenta

jennifercondon@wenta.co.uk

Steve Bedford - Stanta (GE Partner) – St Albans

Steve Bedford

steve@stanta.co.uk

Liza Armstrong - Herts Growth Hub (GE Partner)

Liza Armstrong - lizaa@hertsgrowthhub.com

Lesley Crisp – EDO, Hertsmere Council

Lesley Crisp lesley.crisp@hertsmere.gov.uk

Lauren Dovey – EDO, Watford Borough Council

Lauren.Dovey@watford.gov.uk

Helen Ashby – EDO, Broxbourne Council

helen.ashby@broxbourne.gov.uk