

Meeting Executive
Portfolio Area All
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ASSESSMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMME FOR 2022/23 AND RELATED LOCAL CONSIDERATIONS

KEY DECISION

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To set out the key announcements of relevance to local government in the Government's legislative agenda for the 2022-23 Parliamentary session, and the potential opportunities and implications for Stevenage.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the content of this report be noted and that Members highlight any related matters for officer consideration.

3 CONTEXT

- 3.1 On Tuesday 10 May 2022, during the State Opening of Parliament, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen, set out the Government's agenda for the 2022-23 Parliamentary session.

- 3.2 The speech outlined the UK government's legislative agenda for the coming session. It announced 38 new bills that are intended to be introduced over the next year. Key focuses for local government included: levelling up, planning system reforms, housing regulations and rights for renters, the new Schools Bill, energy, crime and justice, health and transport and infrastructure investment. For the purposes of this report only those Bills directly relevant to Stevenage Borough Council have been taken account of within this report.
- 3.3 The speech was criticised by opposition parties for its lack of immediate response to the growing cost of living crisis, although the Government has subsequently announced (on 26th May 2022) a package of support for households that will be partly subsidised by a windfall tax on energy company profits. A planned Employment Bill also did not feature. With regards to the Government's response to the cost of living crisis it is noted that the impact on inflation has also been questioned.
- 3.4 Since the speech the Government has also announced further details on its plans to implement a full dispersal of asylum seeking refugees across the country. The asylum dispersal system is designed to allocate asylum seekers to different parts of the UK, into Home Office funded accommodation, while they await a decision on their claim.

4 LEVELLING UP AND REGENERATION BILL

- 4.1 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, published on 11 May 2022, aims to drive local growth and empower local leaders to regenerate their areas. It will place a duty on the Government to set Levelling Up missions for a period of five years through a levelling up mission statement. An annual report updating the country on the delivery of these missions will also be produced.
- 4.2 It is worth noting that the Bill gives the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities the power to change or remove missions during the five year period. The changes will be dependent on an assessment of progress and whether the missions will realistically be achieved.
- 4.3 The main elements of the Bill are as follows:
- enshrines in law the 12 "missions" to be achieved by 2030 (see Appendix 1)
 - creation of a new local governance model via three possible levels of devolution:
 - Level 1 – Local authorities working together across a Functional Economic Area (FEA) or whole county area e.g. through a joint committee
 - Level 2 – A single institution or County Council without a Democratically Elected Mayor (DEM), across a FEA or whole county area

- Level 3 – a single institution or County Council with a directly elected mayor (DEM), across a functional economic area (FEA) or whole county area.
- the ability to consolidate existing core local transport funding into a multi-year integrated settlement
- devolution of locally-led brownfield funding, mayoral control of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) functions where boundaries align and the ability to introduce a mayoral precept and supplement on business rates
- digitisation reforms to the planning system with an aim to make local plans easier to find, understand and engage with allowing local authorities to get local plans in place and limit speculative development (i.e. where a piece of land is purchased for construction without any strict pledges regarding what the end use will be)
- a new approach to environmental assessment as part of the planning process so that the environment is prioritised in planning decisions
- new Infrastructure levy to be locally set and non-negotiable to deliver the housing, schools, GPs and new roads that communities need
- new powers for local authorities to bring empty premises back into use and instigate rental auctions of vacant commercial properties in town centres and on high streets
- changes to the process by which street names can be altered
- pavement licences for al fresco dining to be made permanent
- the definition of long-term empty homes will be amended so that it will apply to dwellings empty for one year, rather than two years as at present. This means that councils will have powers to charge up to double council tax for these homes.
- billing authorities will also have powers to charge up to double council tax for dwellings which are substantially furnished and periodically empty (the explanatory note to the Bill says these are often referred to as ‘second homes’)
- Amendments to the Local Government Finance Act 2003 enabling the Secretary of State to give one or more risk-mitigation¹ directions to a local authority in England.

The council is discussing potential opportunities associated with the Governments levelling-up proposals through existing county level partnership structures. This includes consideration of the level of devolution that the County Council and Districts would be comfortable going for and the future role of the Local Enterprise Partnership which under the levelling-up proposals was formally embedded in the national policy agenda for the first time.

¹ Risk-mitigation is described as: “(a) a direction that sets limits in relation to the borrowing of money by the local authority; (b) a direction that requires the local authority to take action specified in the direction. The action specified “may (amongst other things) require the local authority to take action to divest itself of a specified asset”

The District Council Network has shared a response to the local governance proposals with the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The response outlines ideas for adapting the governance model for (mayoral) combined authorities to provide a full role for districts to ensure the combined authority functions smoothly and delivers good outcomes for local communities.

Nationally the Government is encouraging local authorities to think about the 'art of the possible'. On May 24th, the Government's Levelling Up Director General, encouraged councils to recognise that one size does not fit all and highlighted that the Department would be receptive to locally determined proposals - with Cornwall being held-up as an authority which is making significant progress.

There is also a big push nationally to ensure that data collection and return on investment can be demonstrated effectively. In response, the Council is working to match the 12 missions and their draft metrics against the corporate performance suite for 2022/23. The new performance suite will be presented to the Executive in July 2022.

5 RENTERS REFORM BILL

5.1 The Renters Reform Bill was initially proposed under Theresa May's Government in 2019. It was intended to provide a step-change in protections for private renters, ending no-fault evictions and giving landlords and tenants more rights.

5.2 The main elements of the Bill are as follows:

- abolish 'no fault' section 21 evictions by removing the clause from the Housing Act (1988) (a section 21 notice starts the legal process to end an assured shorthold tenancy most private renters have this type of tenancy) empowering tenants to challenge poor practice and unfair rent increases without fear of retaliatory eviction.
- apply the legally binding Decent Homes Standard in the Private Rented Sector giving tenants safer, better quality and better value homes.
- councils will be given greater tools to crack down on non-compliant landlords and poor practice
- a new Ombudsman for private landlords to help resolve disputes out of court and introduce a new property portal which aims to help landlords understand their obligations, while giving tenants and local authorities performance information to hold landlords to account
- introduce stronger possession grounds when there are repeated incidences of rent arrears, and reduce notice periods when there is antisocial behaviour

5.4 A White Paper setting out the details of the Government's proposals is due to be published in the coming months. It is anticipated that the focus on improved conditions will lead to new responsibilities for councils. It will be important that any new burdens are fully funded.

- 5.3 Further information will also be welcomed on the new property portal, and understanding what action can be taken against private landlords and when local councils can intervene.

6 SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATION BILL

- 6.1 In 2020, the Social Housing White Paper set out a range of policies that the Government vowed to bring forward to re-align the relationship between social landlords and tenants. At the heart of the paper was a plan to broaden the remit of the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) to allow it to be more proactive on consumer matters such as disrepair and safety, while also measuring tenant satisfaction. The Bill seeks to bring those proposals into legislation.

- 6.2 The priorities and areas of focus are primarily focused on an expansion of the role and powers of the RSH, this includes:

- the RSH will be able to intervene with landlords who are performing poorly on consumer issues, such as complaints handling and decency of homes, to rectify issues
- be able to give 48 hours' notice to a landlord before a survey is carried out, enabling the Regulator to act more quickly where it has concerns about the decency of a home.
- arrange emergency repairs of tenants' homes following a survey and where there is evidence of systemic failure by the landlord.
- lift the cap on the fines that the Regulator can issue to a landlord who fails to meet required standards.
- create new Tenant Satisfaction Measures which will allow tenants to see how their landlord is performing and help the RSH decide where to focus its attention.

To increase transparency, the Bill will also enable tenants of housing associations to request information from their landlord in a similar way to how the Freedom of Information Act works for tenants of Local Authority landlords.

- 6.3 As a council with management responsibility for approx. 8000 social housing properties officers would welcome from Government more clarity on how the additional financial burden on local councils to implement and monitoring the Tenancy Satisfaction Measures will be met. Similarly, it will be important that any new requirements or responsibilities for councils under this Bill align with proposals being brought forward in both the Fire Safety Act and the Building Safety Act and are fully funded.
- 6.4 At present, there is a £5,000 cap on fines that the Regulator can impose on social landlords. The Government must consider carefully the implications of removing the cap. Fines on council landlords would in effect end up being paid for, at least in part, out of tenants' rents.

7 TRANSPORT BILL

- 7.1 The purpose of this Bill is to ensure a better and more reliable service for passengers to support economic growth across the country. The aims are

linked to the decarbonisation of the UK by 2050 with mass transit vehicles such as buses and trains being proposed to be the most energy efficient mode of travel.

7.2 The main elements of the Bill are as follows:

- Enabling the installation of more electric vehicle charge points throughout the UK as part of the transition away from new petrol and diesel car and van sales by 2030 and building public confidence to switch to zero emission vehicles.
- Providing a new body, Great British Railways, with the powers it needs to act as the single national leader of the railways, with clear lines of accountability for decision-making and joined-up leadership to deliver a customer-focused railway, including by improving accessibility and promoting open data.
- Transferring contracting powers for passenger services to Great British Railways, and ensuring we retain the best of the private sector by expanding its role under the new model, introducing new passenger service contracts focussed on getting the trains running punctually and reliably.
- Introducing new laws that safely enable self-driving and remotely operated vehicles and vessels, support the roll-out of electric vehicle charge points and enabling the licensing of London pedicabs.

7.3 Under the Council's Climate Change Strategy (2020) and working in conjunction with Hertfordshire County Council, a £13m funding bid was submitted to central government for £6m funding for 30 single-deck, electric buses to cover the Stevenage Arriva network. The opening of the new bus interchange close to the train station has been enabled with the hard infrastructure to be Electric Vehicle ready, and will also help contribute to reducing emissions across the town when electric buses are in use. .

8 DRAFT MENTAL HEALTH ACT REFORM BILL

8.1 In 2019 Professor Sir Simon Wessely delivered his Independent Review of the Mental Health Act, this was followed by a White Paper in 2021. It set out what needed to change in both law and practice in order to deliver a modern mental health service that respects the patient's voice and empowers individuals to shape their own care and treatment. It also made recommendations on how to address the disparities in how the act affects people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

8.2 The main elements of the Bill are as follows:

- Helping to address the existing disparities in the use of the Act for people from ethnic minority backgrounds – especially for detentions and for the use of Community Treatment Orders.
- Ensuring that detentions only happen where strictly necessary.
- Amending the definition of mental disorder so that people can no longer be detained solely because they have a learning disability or because they are autistic.

- Changing the criteria needed to detain people, so that the Act is only used where strictly necessary: where the person is a genuine risk to their own safety or that of others, and where there is a clear therapeutic benefit.
- Giving patients better support, including offering everyone the option of an independent mental health advocate, and allowing patients to choose their own 'nominated person', rather than have a 'nearest relative' assigned for them.
- Introducing a 28-day time-limit for transfers from prison to hospital for acutely ill prisoners and ending the temporary use of prison for those awaiting assessment or treatment.
- Introducing a new form of supervised community discharge. This will allow the discharge of restricted patients into the community, with the necessary care and supervision to adequately and appropriately manage their risk.
- Increasing the frequency with which patients can make appeals to Tribunals on their detention and provide Tribunals with a power to recommend that aftercare services are put in place.
- Introducing a statutory care and treatment plan for all patients in detention. This will be written with the patient and will set out a clear pathway to discharge.

8.3 The council's community safety activities in conjunction with the SoSafe Partnership, and our extensive work with residents through the No More and the Evolve service, has heightened awareness of the impact that poor mental health has on an individual, their families and the community.

8.4 The delivery of a modern mental health service is a necessity, but equally important is investment in vital early intervention and prevention services.

8.5 Disparities around access to services for people of BAME heritage has been discussed at the Stevenage Equalities Commissions (SEC) forum sessions and a SEC recommendations report is due to be published in summer 2022.

9 MODERN SLAVERY BILL

In 2015, the Government introduced the Modern Slavery Act making the UK the first country in the world to have legislation dedicated to tackling modern slavery. The purpose of the Bill is enshrine in domestic law the Government's international obligations to victims of modern slavery, especially regarding their rights to assistance and support, providing greater legal certainty for victims. It is also seeking to ensure law enforcement agencies have stronger tools to prevent modern slavery occurring, protect victims of modern slavery and prosecute perpetrators.

9.1 The main elements of the Bill are as follows:

- Strengthen the requirements on businesses with a turnover of £36 million or more to publish an annual modern slavery statement to set out steps taken to prevent modern slavery in their operations and supply chains

- mandate the reporting areas to be covered in modern slavery statements; requiring organisations to publish their statements on a government-run registry, extending these requirements to public bodies and introducing civil penalties for organisations that do not comply with the requirements
- strengthen the operation of Slavery and Trafficking Prevention Orders and Slavery and Trafficking Risk Orders, which place conditions on an individual, to prevent and disrupt modern slavery crimes and better protect victims
- these will be backed up by criminal sanctions for any breaches

9.2 The Council signed up to the Co-operative Party Modern Slavery Charter in 2018. The Charter aims to go beyond existing law and guidance by committing councils to proactively vetting their own supply chain to ensure no instances of modern slavery are taking place.

9.3 The Council has trained its corporate procurement team to challenge any low cost tenders and report any contractors that may be of concern. Officers actively check the Council's supply chains for any signs of potential exploitation.

9.4 The Council requires all of its contractors to comply fully with the Modern Slavery Act 2015, wherever it applies, with contract termination highlighted as a potential sanction for non-compliance.

10 DRAFT VICTIMS BILL

10.1 The draft Victims Bill seeks to ensure there is an effective criminal justice system that serves society by restoring victims' confidence that their voices will be properly heard and that perpetrators will be prosecuted.

10.2 The main elements of the Bill are as follows:

- Enshrining the Victims' Code in law (the Victims' Code focuses on victims' rights and sets out the minimum standard that organisations must provide to victims of crime)
- Increasing transparency and oversight of the services that criminal justice agencies provide to victims by granting a greater role for Police and Crime Commissioners and inspectorates to assess delivery
- Enabling improvements in the quality and consistency of support services for victims of sexual violence, domestic abuse and serious violence
- Elevating and increasing awareness of Independent Sexual Violence Advisors and Independent Domestic Violence Advisors so that they can better work together with other agencies to consistently meet the needs of victims.

10.3 Through the Council's community safety work with the SoSafe Partnership, the response to Anti-Social Behaviour and extensive work with residents through the No More and the Evolve services, Stevenage Borough Council is

acutely aware of the impact of crime on a victim, their families and the wider community.

- 10.4 While action to improve victim support is essential and much needed, it is important that the legislation is accompanied by wider action to reduce crime and prevent people from becoming victims in the first place. This must be underpinned by investment in vital early intervention and prevention services.

11 DRAFT PROTECT DUTY BILL

11.1 The Bill aims to enhance national security by introducing new security requirements for certain public locations and venues to ensure preparedness for and protection from terrorist attacks. It seeks to provide clarity on protective security and preparedness responsibilities for organisations in scope of the Duty.

11.2 The main elements of the Bill are as follows:

- establish a new requirements framework which requires those in control of certain public locations and venues to consider the threat from terrorism and implement appropriate and proportionate mitigation measures
- an inspection and enforcement regime, which will seek to educate, advise, and ensure compliance with the Duty

11.3 The Council takes threats from terrorism extremely seriously and works hard alongside wider partners to keep our community safe. The Council will continue to monitor the development of the Bill closely, particularly in regards to existing or new council duties.

11.4 If inspection and/or enforcement responsibilities are passed to the Council then these will need to be funded appropriately and time should be permitted to allow for communication, preparation, guidance and training, and recruitment of specialised staff prior to implementation.

12 PUBLIC ORDER BILL

12.1 The Bill aims to ensure the police have the tools they need to manage and tackle protesting tactics and prevent major transport projects and infrastructure from being targeted by protesters.

12.2 The main elements of the Bill are as follows:

- Introduce new criminal offences of locking-on and going equipped to lock-on, thereby criminalising the protest tactic of individuals intentionally attaching themselves to others, objects, or buildings to cause serious disruption.
- Making it illegal to obstruct major transport works, including disrupting the construction or maintenance of projects, such as HS2.
- Creating a new criminal offence for interfering with key national infrastructure, which covers any behaviour which obstructs or delays the operation of key infrastructure, such as airports, railways, and printing presses.

- Extending stop and search powers for police to search for and seize articles related to protest-related offences.
- Introducing Serious Disruption Prevention Orders, a new preventative court order targeting protestors who are determined to repeatedly protest; breach of the order will be a criminal offence.

12.3 It is worth noting that the measures set out in the Bill have already been rejected once by the House of Lords, when it voted on the Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts bill – also known as the Policing Bill – which became law in April 2022. The measures voted down by the Lords were Police powers against locking on, blocking infrastructure, and to introduce “protest ASBOs” – these have now come back as part of the Public Order Bill and it is possible that these might be rejected by the House of Lords once more.

12.4 Whilst targeted protesting is not anticipated in Stevenage in the near future the Council will continue to work closely with police colleagues to monitor the associated risks as part of the SBC corporate risk management reporting responsibilities.

13 BREXIT FREEDOMS BILL

13.1 The Bill intends to remove retained EU law as it still applies in the UK and clarify the status of retained EU law in UK domestic law. Retained EU law is a new category of UK law which was created primarily in order to avoid "gaps" opening up in the UK statute book following Brexit and to provide certainty. The provisions in this Bill are intended to create new powers to strengthen the ability to amend, repeal or replace retained EU law by reducing the need to always use primary legislation to do so.

13.2 The proposal to forego primary legislation allowing only limited Parliamentary scrutiny is a key issue for opposing parties. Another key issue will be how far the Government is required to conduct a public consultation on draft legislation before proceeding with a change. The Council will continue to monitor the changes and potential implications.

14 NON-DOMESTIC RATING BILL

14.1 The Bill intends to review and create a fairer, more accurate business rates system, and support businesses and employees to enhance productivity and energy efficiency by making improvements to their place of work.

14.2 The main elements of the Bill are as follows:

- provision to shorten the business rates revaluation cycle from five to three years from 2023
- improve the valuation accuracy and timeliness in a shorter revaluation cycle through new duties on ratepayers with measures to support compliance

- create a power for the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) to provide ratepayers with information on the calculation of their rateable value and measures
- introduce new 12-month rates relief on increases to rateable value arising from improvements made to a property
- a new 100 per cent rates relief for low-carbon heat networks that are assessed as separate entities for business rates

14.3 The Council supports measures to improve valuation accuracy and timeliness. This includes new duties for ratepayers to notify the VOA of information concerning the calculation of their rateable value. There should also be measures for further information to be provided to billing authorities where this would enable councils to discharge their functions effectively. The implementation of the new reliefs (including how councils will be fully compensated for income foregone) as well as for any new burdens arising from the administration of these reliefs must be reviewed to ensure that the burden of those reliefs is not funded by local councils.

14.4 Reducing the revaluation cycle from five to three years is likely to mean a business rate reset on any gains for councils, reducing the time any gains above the baseline are retained.

15 PROCUREMENT BILL

15.1 The Procurement Bill seeks to take advantage of Brexit by reforming the UK's public procurement regime to create a more transparent system that better meets the country's needs, rather than being based on transposed EU directives. It also aims to boost business by making public procurement more accessible for new entrants such as small businesses and voluntary, charitable and social enterprises, enabling them to compete for public contracts.

15.2 The main elements of the Bill are as follows:

- establishing a single digital platform for supplier registration where businesses will only have to submit their data once to qualify for any public sector procurement
- Introducing new arrangements to buy at pace when needed to protect life, health, or public order,
- Enabling smaller contracts to be restricted to UK suppliers, as permitted by World Trade Organization rules, and ensuring that procurement activities aid jobs and innovation.
- Helping buyers to disqualify suppliers who are unfit to bid for public contracts because of past misconduct, corruption or poor performance.
- Requiring buyers to have regard to the Government's strategic priorities for public procurement as set out in the National Procurement Policy Statement.

- Providing a number of sector-specific features where necessary, including tailored rules to better suit defence and security procurement in order to protect our national interests.

15.3 It is the Council's view that priorities for procurement should be based on local strategic priorities. This includes ensuring that local businesses are encouraged and supported to secure contracts as highlighted within the Co-operative Procurement Strategy which was signed off by the Executive in 2021.

15.4 For example, the Council has chosen to use the Social Value Portal to manage its tendered contracts. Through the portal, social value themes, opportunities and measures are determined which help the Council to deliver locally defined social value outcomes.

15.5 Officers will welcome the receipt of more detail as proposals are developed by Government.

16 DRAFT AUDIT REFORM BILL

16.1 The draft Audit Reform Bill seeks to rebuild trust in the UK's audit, corporate reporting and corporate governance system and the insolvency regulatory framework. This Bill follows the 'Restoring trust in audit and corporate governance consultation' in 2021 which sought views on proposals to strengthen the UK's framework for major companies and the way they are audited.

16.2 The main elements of the Bill are as follows:

- Establishing a new statutory regulator, the Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority (ARGA), that will protect and promote the interests of investors, other users of corporate reporting and the wider public interest.
- Providing new measures to open up the market, including a new approach of managed shared audit in which challenger firms undertake a share of the work on large-scale audits.
- Bringing the largest private companies in scope of regulation in the definition of 'public interest entities', recognising the public interest in companies of this size.
- Giving the new regulator effective powers to enforce directors' financial reporting duties, to supervise corporate reporting, and to oversee and regulate the accountancy and actuarial professions.
- Reforming the regulation of Insolvency Practitioners to give greater confidence to creditors and strengthening corporate governance of firms in or approaching insolvency so that 'asset stripping' can be more effectively tackled.

16.3 The Local Government Association's position is that local audit faces a number of problems that need addressing. The independent review by Sir Tony Redmond into the effectiveness of external audit and transparency of financial reporting in local authorities concluded that the local audit market is

fragile and external audit firms missing audit deadlines has become normal. However the Redmond review did not address the complex nature of Statement of Accounts and the ability for the reader to understand them.

- 16.4 With the introduction of a draft Bill, any legislation is unlikely to be in place for some time and therefore the current resourcing issues for the Audit companies and the ability to complete audits for local authorities by the deadlines will remain problematic. At the time this report was written there were nationally a significant number of 2019/20 and 2020/21 audits not signed off, including Stevenage Borough Council.
- 16.5 The introduction of the ARGAs as a dedicated system leader for local audit means the accountable body is clear unlike the current position.. For this role to be fulfilled there is a need for a dedicated and specialist team within the ARGAs with sufficient knowledge of local audit and local government.

17 DATA REFORM BILL

- 17.1 The Data Reform Bill seeks to modernise the Information Commissioner's Office by providing it with enhanced capabilities and powers, and increase industry participation in Smart Data Schemes which will give citizens and small businesses more control of their data. The main elements of the Bill are to ensure the protection of UK citizens' personal data, enable data to be "shared more efficiently between public bodies", and to design "a more flexible, outcomes-focused approach to data protection".
- 17.2 It is hoped that the Government will consult with relevant data protection expert groups and professionals in local government on the future of the new data rights regime and any other reforms which will impact on councils' delivery of services. Any new regime or body must add value and not duplicate the work of other bodies.

18 UK INFRASTRUCTURE BANK BILL

- 18.1 The UK Infrastructure Bank (UKIB) was launched in June 2021. HM Treasury issued a policy document providing detail on the mandate and design of UKIB, its rationale and its initial areas of focus.
- 18.2 Over five years the bank will have £4 billion to lend to local authorities for individual high value and strategic projects, at least £5 million of which will support regional and local economic growth or help deliver net zero carbon emissions. Currently all lending by the bank to local authorities has to be via the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB). This Bill establishes the bank as a statutory body which will enable it to lend to local authorities directly.
- 18.3 The Bill will finalise the creation of the UKIB by establishing it in law with clear objectives to support regional and local economic growth and deliver of net zero carbon emissions by 2050, and ensuring it has the full range of spending and lending powers.
- 18.4 The main elements of the Bill are as follows:

- Enshrining the Bank's objectives and functions in legislation to ensure that it will be a long-lasting institution with a clear policy mandate to support economic growth, including at a regional and local level, and the delivery of net zero
- Protecting the Bank's operational independence by setting out clear accountability for how it is to be run, including reporting and board requirements
- Providing the Bank with the necessary powers to lend directly to local authorities and the Northern Ireland Executive, enabling the Bank to play a key role in delivering public sector infrastructure projects.

18.5 The establishment of UKIB will potentially give greater choice in financing options to local authorities and potentially entities such as the Hertfordshire Growth Board. The LGA reports that councils regularly flag financing as one of the greatest challenges in achieving their net zero objectives.

19 BOYCOTTS, DIVESTMENT AND SANCTIONS BILL

19.1 The Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions Bill (BDS) seeks to prevent public bodies from taking a different approach to the UK Government on sanctions and foreign relations. This includes preventing public institutions carrying out independent boycotts, divestments and sanctions that converge with UK foreign and defence policy.

19.2 It should be noted that there is already a provision in primary legislation (section 100 of the Public Service Pensions and Judicial Offices Act 2022) (PSPJOA) that gives the Government powers to issue guidance on BDS-related matters in the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). It is unclear whether the BDS Bill will go further than the existing provision in the PSPJOA in relation to the LGPS.

19.3 It is the view of the LGA that there is no need for further provisions to cover LGPS investment decisions.

20 ASYLUM SEEKER DISPERSAL

20.1 In May 2022 the Home Office began consulting on proposals to reform the asylum dispersal system across all local authority areas in England, Scotland and Wales. The asylum dispersal system is designed to allocate asylum seekers to different parts of the UK, into Home Office funded accommodation, while they await a decision on their claim. The reform proposals include:

- To move asylum seekers from costly hotels to dispersed accommodation
- To require all local authorities to participate in the scheme and have a plan in place at the regional level. The Government are quoting less than half of local authorities are engaged in the dispersed accommodation programme currently (47%)

- The Government are proposing full dispersal now, with all areas to participate and a cap of 0.5% of the ratio of asylum seekers to existing population
- Local authorities will receive a payment of £3,500 per dispersed place in the current Financial Year (beyond the £250 grant currently issued)

- 20.2 In addition, the Full Dispersal model, backed by new Government funding, is supposed to allow accommodation providers, working on behalf of the Home Office, to identify private rental sector properties that can be procured for asylum dispersal accommodation.
- 20.3 Any specific concerns about procuring specific properties or procuring properties in a specific postcode can be raised for consideration. These objections can be raised on four grounds: concerns around social cohesion, if procurement will impact on development or community plans, the issues with the provision of wraparound services and if a property has special characteristics in short supply (e.g a property adapted for someone with disabilities).
- 20.4 The consultation closes in July and works at the level of the Strategic Migration Partnership (ie there is one in place for each of the 12 regions and nations). Through consultation, the Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP) will work to agree a regional plan and sufficient dispersal accommodation.
- 20.5 There will be consideration of elements such as existing market demands and other pressures (the Home Office cite the impacts emerging from Ukraine and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme). Locally the Council would highlight the extraordinary local homelessness pressures being experienced as well as concerns that if the programme and plan is driven to the cap (for Stevenage, that would be a cap of 440), then alongside market forces (i.e. lower rent), there is a risk that Stevenage and other towns absorb a higher allocation and greater capacity challenges.
- 20.6 The Council have made clear its position over the last year, which is that there should be co-ordinated plans at county or regional level, rather than a focus on some of the areas that have lower private housing market costs such as Stevenage. Equally, officers have strongly encouraged use of a dispersed model, with funding, to enable a planned response rather than 100 – 200 hotel or apartments being co-opted. Whilst the proposed desire to move to a more strategic approach is understood, it is important that local considerations are fully taken into account before related decisions are made. In the meantime officers are continuing to engage with the Home Office and the Strategic Migration Partnership.

21 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 21.1 This paper summarises the Government legislative programme for 2022/23. Many of the Bills that have been highlighted will have direct and indirect implications for Stevenage as a town and Stevenage Borough Council and, potentially, the delivery of its key corporate priorities. It is therefore important

that the related implications are considered and that attention is paid to further announcements and the actual Bills as they are published.

- 21.2 The Senior Leadership Team have given consideration to the legislative programme and will continue to highlight opportunities and perceived threats over the coming months.

22 IMPLICATIONS

22.1 Financial Implications

- 22.1.1 There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations contained in this report. However, officers will monitor further announcements and draft / final Bills as that are published to consider any financial implications should they arise. It is of course hoped that any new burdens will be fully funded.

22.2 Legal Implications

- 22.2.1 There are no direct legal implications from the recommendations contained in this report. However, officers will monitor further announcements and draft / final Bills as that are published to consider any legal implications should they arise.

22.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 22.3.1 There are no direct equality and diversity implications from the recommendations contained in this report. However, officers will monitor further announcements and draft / final Bills as that are published to consider any equality and diversity implications should they arise. Where appropriate, Equality Impact Assessments will be completed.

22.4 Risk Implications

- 22.4.1 There are no direct significant risks to the Council in agreeing the recommendations. However, officers will monitor further announcements and draft / final Bills as that are published to consider any risk implications should they arise.
- 22.4.2 The Council has an embedded approach to risk management that mitigates any adverse effect on delivery of the Council's objectives and internal control processes and also provides good governance assurance.

22.5 Other Corporate implications

- 22.5.1 Further government announcements may impact on the development of future policy or procedure.

APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: The 12 Missions to Level Up the UK

Appendix 1: The 12 Missions to Level Up the UK

- 1.** By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.
- 2.** By 2030, domestic public investment in Research & Development outside the Greater South East will increase by at least 40% and at least one third over the Spending Review period, with that additional government funding seeking to leverage at least twice as much private sector investment over the long term to stimulate innovation and productivity growth.
- 3.** By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing.
- 4.** By 2030, the UK will have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for the majority of the population.
- 5.** By 2030, the number of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths will have significantly increased. In England, this will mean 90% of children will achieve the expected standard, and the percentage of children meeting the expected standard in the worst performing areas will have increased by over a third.
- 6.** By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas.
- 7.** By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed, and by 2035 HLE will rise by 5 years.
- 8.** By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.
- 9.** By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.
- 10.** By 2030, renters will have a secure path to ownership with the number of first-time buyers increasing in all areas; and the government's ambition is for the number of non-decent rented homes to have fallen by 50%, with the biggest improvements in the lowest performing areas.
- 11.** By 2030, homicide, serious violence, and neighbourhood crime will have fallen, focused on the worst-affected areas.
- 12.** By 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement.