

Public Document Pack



COUNCIL

Wednesday, 22 July 2026

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

PART 1

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COUNCIL – 22 JULY 2026

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Questions to Portfolio Holders / Committee Chairs

(A) Question from Daryl Osborn - BUGS

With reference to the Environment and Economy Select Committee report entitled 'ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE: FINAL REPORT - REVIEW OF BUS SERVICES' dated 06/02/24, and the recommendations contained therein, what progress has been made in relation to each individual recommendation set out within that report?

Answer (Councillor Rob Broom):

Answer:

I would like to thank both the Environment and Economy Select Committee and BUGS for their continued interest in improving public transport across Stevenage.

Following publication of the Committee's Review of Bus Services in February 2024, progress has been made against a number of the review's recommendations. This includes improvements to real-time passenger information, enhanced engagement with disability groups, ongoing work to improve accessibility at Stevenage Bus Interchange, investment in newer and cleaner bus fleets, and the continued development of Hertfordshire County Council's proposals for bus franchising and network accessibility.

Many of the recommendations relate to matters that fall primarily within the remit of Hertfordshire County Council as the local transport authority or Arriva as the principal bus operator. However, Stevenage Borough Council has continued to work closely with both organisations to champion the interests of Stevenage residents and support improvements to public transport across the town.

Recommendations arising from Select Committee reviews are subject to formal monitoring and periodic reporting back to the relevant Scrutiny Committee. To assist that process, updates have been sought from Hertfordshire County Council, Arriva and Stevenage Borough Council on the progress made since the review was completed.

The detailed response to each of the Committee's 13 recommendations is set out in Appendix A. Members are therefore referred to Appendix A for a recommendation-by-recommendation update, including the actions taken, progress achieved and ongoing work associated with each individual recommendation.

Overall, whilst progress has varied depending on the organisation responsible for delivery, there is evidence that each recommendation has either been

implemented, is currently being progressed, or remains under active consideration by the relevant partner organisation.

(B) Question from Jack Downie-Webb

The latest data from the CPRE reveals that there are currently 273 long-term empty homes sitting unused within Stevenage. Stevenage Borough Council frequently justifies the ongoing development and loss of our town's green spaces, such as those in and around Symonds Green, by citing housing need. However, other local authorities, including councils like Mid Suffolk and Lewes District Council, are successfully using their legal powers to tackle this issue without further loss of green space. They're implementing Council Tax premiums, using Empty Dwelling Management Orders, and pursuing targeted Compulsory Purchase Orders to bring wasted properties back onto the market. While these tactics are already described in Stevenage Borough Council's own Empty Homes Strategy, the fact that 273 properties remain unused suggests these powers are not being used to their full effect.

Will the council commit to prioritising bringing these empty homes back into use, which it already has powers to do, before approving further loss of our green spaces?

Answer: (Councillor Loraine Rossati)

The Council agrees that long-term empty homes represent a wasted housing resource and that, wherever possible, properties should be brought back into use for local residents. Empty homes can have a negative impact on neighbourhoods, particularly where they fall into disrepair, attract anti-social behaviour or become a source of concern for nearby residents.

However, it is important to consider this issue within the wider context of the housing challenges facing both Stevenage and the country as a whole. The UK continues to experience a significant housing shortage, particularly of affordable housing.

Demand for social rented and affordable homes continues to outstrip supply in many parts of the country, creating real pressures for local communities and councils.

Like all local authorities, Stevenage Borough Council is required through the planning system to assess and meet the housing needs of its area through an adopted Local Plan.

The Stevenage Local Plan identifies a requirement for approximately 7,600 additional homes over the plan period, alongside new employment opportunities, infrastructure, community facilities and environmental improvements. The Local Plan seeks to achieve this in a sustainable way, balancing the need for new homes with the protection of valued green spaces,

investment in regeneration, support for economic growth and the delivery of new council homes for local people.

The latest Council Tax data shows that there are currently 277 long-term empty homes in Stevenage. Whilst every empty property is one we would prefer to see occupied, this figure represents approximately 0.71% of the town's housing stock of around 38,700 homes. It also equates to only around 3.6% of Stevenage's identified housing requirement of approximately 7,600 homes. In other words, even if every long-term empty home in the town were brought back into occupation immediately, there would still remain a substantial need for additional housing, particularly affordable and social housing.

It is also important to recognise that not all empty homes are abandoned properties. Homes can become vacant for many legitimate reasons, including bereavement and probate, refurbishment works, major repairs following damage, legal disputes, changes in ownership, relocation of occupants, or because they are being prepared for sale or letting. Some properties may also be held pending wider regeneration proposals. Consequently, not all empty homes are suitable for intervention by the Council.

In comparison with other areas, Stevenage performs relatively well. Government statistics show that Stevenage has one of the lowest proportions of long-term empty homes in Hertfordshire. Based on the latest published figures, only Three Rivers has a slightly lower percentage. Furthermore, the Council's 2024 Stock Condition Survey found that Stevenage's overall vacancy rate of 3.2% was lower than both the East of England average of 4.3% and the national average of 5.4%.

That said, the Council remains proactive in tackling long-term empty homes. We have an updated Empty Homes Policy and undertake proactive monitoring of properties that have been vacant for extended periods. Following the recruitment of additional officer capacity, inspections are carried out on long-term empty homes and properties are assessed based on factors such as their condition, impact on neighbours and the length of time they have remained empty.

Where appropriate, the Council works informally with owners to help bring homes back into use. In more serious cases, where properties are causing nuisance or have remained empty for prolonged periods without a clear prospect of reoccupation, the Council can consider formal action. Powers available include enforcement notices, Empty Dwelling Management Orders, enforced sale procedures and in exceptional circumstances, compulsory purchase powers. In addition, through the Housing Development Programme, the Council has periodically acquired existing properties where this has represented a good opportunity to increase the supply of affordable housing.

The Council is always willing to explore additional tools and opportunities to bring long-term empty homes back into use. However, the reality is that resolving the empty homes issue alone will not address the scale of housing need facing Stevenage. As of 17 July 2026, there were 1742 households on

the Council's Housing Register, demonstrating the significant demand for affordable housing within the town.

For that reason, our approach is not an either/or choice between tackling empty homes and building new homes. We must do both. The Council will continue to work proactively to reduce the number of long-term empty properties, whilst also delivering new homes, including new council homes such as those being delivered through our housing development programme, to ensure that local people have access to the housing they need both now and in the future.

This balanced approach enables us to address under-used housing stock where appropriate, whilst continuing to meet the wider housing needs of a growing town in a way that remains true to Stevenage's values of sustainability, regeneration, opportunity and community

Appendix A

Many of the recommendations contained within the Select Committee's report relate to matters that fall primarily within the remit of Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) or Arriva rather than Stevenage Borough Council directly.

To help inform this response, the Council has contacted both HCC and Arriva for an update on progress against those recommendations.

Of the 13 recommendations made by the Select Committee, Stevenage Borough Council has a more direct role in relation to Recommendations 1, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 13. An update on those recommendations is set out below:

Recommendation 1 - It is recommended that SBC Executive Portfolio Holder for Transport be invited to consider holding a yearly transport seminar for Stevenage bringing together the HCC transport unit and the public transport providers to hold them to account regarding the performance of their contracts with a view to champion local users' needs and bring a focus on improved performance.

Answer from SBC: SBC Officers meet HCC officers regularly on transportation matters, including through the strategically focused 'Transport Mission Steering Group' which considers longer term policy and strategy direction for the town and wider area. In addition, Officers and Members meet counterparts on project specific matters that relate to transport schemes and upgrades across the town. As yet the scope of these meetings does not include contract management discussions with HCC. SBC officers have received support from Arriva on this initiative.

The Cabinet Member for Transport (SBC) would welcome regular quarterly Meetings with Stevenage (BUGS) to discuss the local provision of services, representation from the County Transport Team would be welcomed.

Recommendation 2 - It is recommended that (i) Arriva be strongly encouraged to update the real time information for bus services on their website and App, as bus users rely on this information to wait for bus services, if cancelled or delayed; and (ii) that real-time information also be included at bus stops, so passengers know when the next bus is due and also if a service is not running etc.

Answer from HCC: 520 RTI display units have been installed across Hertfordshire, including 25 interactive information kiosks. HCC are working with system providers to enable RTI tracking on the Intalink website.

There are complexities arising from cross-journey predictions, which are particularly problematic at bus stations and interchanges. Work is currently underway to identify a solution to this issue.

In relation to cancelled journeys and service disruption messaging, a potential solution does exist; however, at present it does not provide a sufficient level of accuracy to instil confidence among members of the public. There is a risk that inaccurate disruption messaging could lead to passengers missing their journeys.

Answer from Arriva: Arriva have recently launched a new website and app with much better real-time information and are making a concerted effort to ensure all cancellations are shown on these platforms.

Recommendation 3 – It is recommended that (i) to help wheelchair users and disabled and the visually impaired that some (a least two or three) of the information screens in the bus interchange be lowered and the contrast of those screens be adjusted to provide a good contrast to enable those users to be able to read the information more easily, and (ii) in addition, that a similar sign to the RNIB signage used near the ticket office at the railway station be installed at the bus interchange.

Answer from SBC:

The Council is committed to ensuring that Stevenage Bus Interchange is accessible for all users and has taken positive steps to progress the Committee's recommendations.

In April 2026, the Council met with the Stevenage Sightlife Group to hear directly from people with visual impairments about their experiences of using the interchange and to better understand the practical improvements that would make the greatest difference. This engagement has provided valuable insight into how the facility can be made more inclusive and user-friendly.

Following the meeting, the Council has commenced a review of accessibility arrangements within the interchange. This includes assessing the positioning of passenger information screens within the reception area, including opportunities to lower selected screens to improve accessibility for wheelchair users and disabled passengers. The Council is also considering measures to improve screen readability, including contrast and visibility, to assist people with visual impairments.

In addition, the Council is exploring a wider package of accessibility enhancements in response to feedback received. These include the potential introduction of audio announcements, improved wayfinding, embossed or tactile signage to help identify individual bus stops, and options similar to the RNIB guidance signage already in place at Stevenage Railway Station.

The Council intends to continue working closely with the Stevenage Sightlife Group, Hertfordshire County Council and other relevant partners to help shape and prioritise future improvements. This ongoing collaboration will help ensure that the interchange continues to evolve as an accessible, welcoming and inclusive facility for all residents and visitors

Answer from Arriva: Arriva will assess the feasibility of relocating selected passenger information screens within the Bus Interchange to more accessible positions.

Recommendation 4 - It is recommended that HCC Passenger Transport Unit and Arriva need to engage in an open and ongoing conversation with disability groups like Herts Vision Loss to help refine and shape the services, as it appeared to Members that this was not currently the case; and (ii) the use of trusted apps for those with disabilities be championed by bus providers and transport authorities at HCC.

Answer from HCC: HCC is currently developing a Bus Network Accessibility Plan (BNAP) which will devise a minimum standard for accessibility across the local bus network; this work will be completed by April 27. Development of the BNAP will include extensive engagement with local disability groups. HCC has procured consultants from the RNIB to help develop and deliver the BNAP.

A full audit is being carried out on all local bus infrastructure and a dedicated accessibility working group will be established to ensure stakeholder input. The BNAP will also review the accessibility of websites, apps and all service information (i.e. printed publicity/ timetables).

HCC have recently met with Stevenage Vision Loss group and have informed the group about the work on the BNAP.

Answer from Arriva: Recently Arriva and HCC participated in a session with Stevenage Sight Life and Hertfordshire Vision Loss.

Recommendation 5 - It is recommended that Arriva should revisit their driver training regarding courtesy and care towards disabled passengers. This should be looked at based on the evidence submitted by Herts Vision Loss, who reported that their members were, on occasion, not given sufficient time to be seated when boarding or were dismissed or ignored by some drivers when asking for assistance or information about the bus route etc.

Answer from Arriva: This is picked up in our initial driver training and ongoing CPC training

Recommendation 6 - It is recommended that HCC Passenger Transport Unit and Arriva advance the roll out of audio announcement on buses as well as visual displays screens, which need to be retrofitted to all existing fleet and be provided as standard on any new fleet stock.

Answer from HCC: The DfT announced in 2023 that they were introducing rules that require almost every local bus or coach service to provide audible announcements and visual displays identifying the route and direction, each upcoming stop and the beginning of any diversions.

The regulations started on 1 October 2023, but when each vehicle must comply depends on when it was first used on local services.

“First used” means when the vehicle first met the criteria for local service use, regardless of where it operated.

Compliance deadlines by vehicle age are:

On/after 1 Oct 2019: must comply from 1 Oct 2024

1 Oct 2014 – 30 Sep 2019: must comply from 1 Oct 2025

1 Jan 1973 – 30 Sep 2014: must comply from 1 Oct 2026

Partially compliant vehicles: must comply from 1 Oct 2031

Answer from Arriva: All fleet should be fitted with AV screens by the end of the year.

Recommendation 7 - It is recommended that (i) In the first instance, bus companies should be encouraged to consider electric vehicles or other alternatives to move away from fossil fuels; and (ii) during the long transition to EV electric replacement buses and considering the variable supply of hydrogen, that HCC and Arriva be invited to consider using a more environmentally friendly Biodiesel which produces 90% less carbon than conventional diesel.

Answer from HCC: A full transition to alternative fuels instead of diesel should remain the long-term objective; however, the financial implications of such a shift must be carefully considered. These costs extend beyond the vehicles themselves to include the necessary supporting infrastructure. For example, installing electric charging points in depots can significantly reduce available space. Even in larger, traditional “ex-National Bus” depots, where fleet sizes are typically smaller, the space required to charge an entire fleet overnight is substantial.

Additionally, the operational limitations of electric vehicles, particularly their range before requiring recharging, must be taken into account. This may necessitate changes to existing service patterns and the wider operating model.

Answer from Arriva: We continue to consider Zero Emission vehicles, but currently they are too expensive compared to diesel vehicles. We need funding support to move forward with ZEV. However, we are investing significantly in our fleet in Stevenage this year, bringing in a number of brand-new Euro 6 diesel vehicles which will improve the overall emissions of the bus fleet in Stevenage significantly.

Recommendation 8 - It is recommended that regarding new housing developments, that SBC Planning and Development Officers should consult with Bus Companies regarding their views to help avoid any unintended consequences to buses using routes into new housing developments and that HCC Highways Officers should be invited to consult with bus companies regarding the introduction of traffic calming measures such as speed bumps, narrowed roads or chicanes that can make bus journeys slower and therefore not run to optimum journey times. If there are to be any changes made to road schemes for traffic calming these should consider such measures as bus gates.

Answer from SBC: *Hertfordshire County Council is a key consultee on major planning applications within the borough, particularly where highway and passenger transport matters arise. In considering larger development proposals, Stevenage Borough Council's Planning and Development Officers take account of consultation responses from relevant statutory consultees, including Hertfordshire County Council, whose comments may reflect passenger transport and bus access considerations. The detailed design of highway layouts, traffic calming measures and bus route suitability is primarily a matter for Hertfordshire County Council as the local highway authority, working where necessary with bus operators. Through the planning process, the Council will continue to have regard to the need for new development to be accessible and to avoid unintended impacts on public transport operation wherever these matters are raised as part of the consultation process.*

Answer from Arriva: This is currently happening, co-ordinated by HCC.

Recommendation 9 – It is recommended that regarding the new bus station interchange:

- (i) SBC, fully consider the use of the Bus Station in its new location, and the user experience. In respect of the pedestrian access from the Bus Station through to the shops, the existing signage be reviewed to ensure that it is clear which way to walk to the shops to encourage pedestrians to use the designed route to the pedestrianised Town Centre along the front of the Leisure Centre, rather than to the side of Daneshill House/Registry Office, which should be discouraged as it was equidistance to the route in front on the leisure centre, but was less safe, as it is on a main road;
- (ii) Officers and Partners should consider means of assisting older and disabled users to move from the Bus Station into the town, such as a shuttle bus*, and if an opportunity arises in the future to enhance the provision of mobility services that consideration be given to locating these at the Bus Interchange;
- (iii) that the provision of WiFi be considered at the Bus Interchange to help passengers access the Arriva App; and
- (iv) that Officers and Partners consider all available options to ensure that there is a safe and comfortable user experience at the Bus Station.

Answer from SBC: *The Council recognises the importance of ensuring that the new bus interchange provides a safe, accessible and positive experience for users. In relation to pedestrian movement between the bus interchange and the town centre, signage and wayfinding will be kept under review as part of the wider management of the town centre environment, with the aim of encouraging use of the most appropriate and convenient pedestrian routes. In respect of measures to support older and disabled users, including any future mobility or shuttle-type provision, this would require consideration alongside partner organisations and service providers. The Council will also continue to consider, with relevant partners, opportunities to enhance the overall user experience at the interchange, including matters such as comfort, accessibility, safety and digital connectivity.*

Recommendation 10 – It is recommended that as part of the regeneration of the town centre strategically placed bus stops near public infrastructure will need to be provided, for example there should be a bus stop provided at the new leisure centre when this is built at the town centre gardens, St Georges Way site, as well as consideration of a new bus route to service any new stops.

Answer from SBC: *The Council recognises the importance of ensuring that town centre regeneration proposals are supported by accessible and well-located public transport infrastructure. As regeneration plans for the town centre progress, consideration will continue to be given to how new development can be served by nearby bus stops and appropriate public transport connections. The provision of new bus stops and any changes to bus routes, however, will require engagement with Hertfordshire County Council as the local transport authority, together with bus operators, as these matters sit beyond the Council's direct control. Stevenage Borough Council will continue to work with relevant partners to help ensure that public transport access is prioritised, and services to the new Leisure Centre are in place.*

Recommendation 11 – It is recommended that Arriva and HCC be encouraged to consider the provision of a spine route running from the north to the south of the town.

Answer from HCC: Following BSIP improvements to bus services in Hertfordshire, there are now at least five buses an hour on Mondays to Saturdays (301, 400, 725, 907/907A) operating along London Road into town from the south with three buses an hour continuing to Old Town and Lister Hospital. Because of this, it is considered the need for a shuttle service is of reduced priority.

Stevenage is within the proposed franchise area, and all options are, in essence, open to consideration. However, there is a risk with cross-town services that a delay on one side of town has a material effect on the other. This can lead to a skewed amount of lost mileage towards the side not affected by the delays. There would also need to be discussions as to which northern and southern areas are linked

Answer from Arriva: This is something we have looked at and do not believe that it would be commercially viable. The 301 provides this link whilst also offering other journey options. Bus accessibility at Roaring Meg is very poor and some improvements here to improve the attractiveness of bus to this key destination in Stevenage would have drive further patronage on this corridor.

Recommendation 12 – It is recommended that SBC via the Executive Portfolio Holder for Enterprise and Transport lobby HCC to consider different funding models for the provision of bus travel for Hertfordshire as it was felt that it was right to challenge the funding model which was not currently delivering a service that was fit for purpose.

Answer from HCC: Hertfordshire County Council is actively pursuing Franchising opportunities for North and East Herts, including Stevenage. It is hoped that the project moves to advanced business case situation with the DfT shortly.

Answer from SBC: *The Council recognises that responsibility for bus service funding models sits primarily with Hertfordshire County Council as the local transport authority, rather than with Stevenage Borough Council directly. However, where appropriate, Stevenage Borough Council continues to raise local concerns and advocate for improvements to bus provision through its ongoing engagement with Hertfordshire County Council and other relevant partners. Any decisions on alternative funding models, however, remain a matter for Hertfordshire County Council and bus operators.*

Answer from Arriva: I think the issue is more the level of funding rather than the funding model. The current bus network relies predominantly on being paid for through the fares of those using the services and this leads to a level of service driven by the resource that can be funded through this demand driven revenue. Any increase in service level requires more resource which means significant funding to bridge the gap between the commercial level of service and the desired level, as the costs of enhancements inevitably are higher than the additional revenue they generate. This funding is not currently forthcoming regardless of the funding model. The other question to consider is how current funding towards buses is used effectively, and whether the objective of it is to address social needs, ie providing a minimum service level of coverage to as many residents as possible, and in turn spreading the funding quite thinly across a large number of services and geography, or focussing on smaller areas to drive higher bus use across the area. In simple terms, if you have funding for a single vehicle, should it be used to provide an irregular rural service, giving a service to an area that would be otherwise unserved and addressing the social need, and consequently generating very little usage, or should it be invested in enhancing already good services to drive larger patronage growth and having a bigger impact on a town's economy and levels of traffic congestion, perhaps in an urban area moving a service from every 20 minutes to every 15 minutes. Ultimately, these are difficult decisions to be made by the appropriate elected politicians, but the questions remain regardless of the funding model.

Recommendation 13 - It is recommended that consideration should be given to a circular bus route between Roaring Meg, Leisure Park, Old Town and the Town Centre, and that officers of the Council review this to identify any funding opportunities, if possible as an electric bus service.

Answer from HCC: There have been previous services that operated around the estates in Stevenage without accessing the town centre. These had steady but low use. There are opportunities to introduce such a service with developer contributions going forward.

Answer from Arriva: Service 301 provides much of this link currently but generates more patronage than a separate service would generate because it also links areas further afield to the Old town and the hospital. The shift of retail from the Town Centre to Roaring Meg has had a huge impact on bus patronage in the town. Historically, the main destination in Stevenage was the town centre and with the costs of parking there, the bus was a very attractive proposition even for car owners, and this was reflected in higher patronage, more frequent services and less traffic congestion. The shift with retail in recent decades towards Roaring Meg has reduced the attractiveness and footfall of the Town Centre significantly, and the offer of free parking makes the bus very unattractive to car owners driving patronage lower across the town. Also, the layout

of Roaring Meg very much prioritises car usage, with bus stops very much on the periphery, and being of a low quality in terms of accessibility and attractiveness to passengers. Addressing the infrastructure issues will drive more patronage and in the longer term a better level of service to Roaring Meg.

COUNCIL – 22 JULY 2026

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Questions to Portfolio Holders / Committee Chairs

(A) Question from Councillor Peter Wilkins

With the introduction of food waste collection and the completion of phase 2 of the flat block recycling scheme in the Borough can the council advise what our current recycling rate is (expressed as a percentage of all waste recycled.)

Answer (Councillor Rob Broom):

Waste and recycling data is reported through WasteDataFlow, the national reporting system used by local authorities to submit verified waste data to Government.

Due to the reporting and validation process, data is typically available around three months in arrears and, as a result, we are not yet in a position to report the full impact of the borough-wide food waste service or the completion of Phase 2 of the flats recycling programme within the official recycling rate. Once the validated data is available, we will of course share it.

However, what I can say is that Stevenage's overall recycling rate stood at approximately 38% for 2025/26, and there are already encouraging signs that our major investment in recycling services is having a positive impact.

The successful introduction of weekly food waste collections earlier this year was one of the largest changes to the Council's waste service in decades. It required extensive planning and preparation, including the procurement of new collection vehicles, the distribution of new food waste bins and caddies to households across the borough, the recruitment and training of additional collection crews, and a significant communications campaign. I would particularly like to recognise the fantastic support from local schools, which helped raise awareness amongst families and played an important role in encouraging residents to embrace the new service.

The launch itself was delivered successfully and on schedule, which was a significant achievement. Nationally, around a quarter of councils due to introduce food waste collections did not manage to go live when planned, making Stevenage's successful implementation all the more noteworthy.

Early indications are positive. Recent participation surveys show that 52% of households are regularly presenting a food waste bin for collection, which represents a strong starting point for a completely new service. The completion of Phase 2 of the flats recycling programme is also helping to make recycling easier and more accessible for more residents across the borough.

While we are pleased with this level of engagement, we are ambitious to go further. Increasing recycling rates remains a key priority for the Council and we will continue working with residents, schools, community groups and partners to maximise participation, reduce waste and improve environmental outcomes for the town.

I look forward to reporting back once the validated data is available and demonstrating the full impact these improvements are having on Stevenage's recycling performance.

(B) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

To date, what has been the impact of this year's inclement weather on the Council's planned schedule of environmental maintenance including weeding, grass cutting and hedge/tree pruning?

Answer: (Councillor Rob Broom)

Due to the warmer weather, grass growth has slowed, allowing resources to be redirected to other landscape maintenance activities, including hedge cutting and shrub bed pruning.

There has been no noticeable increase in weed growth, and routine weed control treatments are continuing as planned, with two treatments scheduled annually.

During periods of extreme heat, operational teams have adjusted their working hours and commenced work earlier in the day. This has enabled staff to complete the majority of their tasks before temperatures reach their peak in the mid to late afternoon, helping to maintain productivity while supporting staff wellbeing and safety.

(C) Question from Councillor Phil Bibby

Would the Cabinet Member please advise how fuel inflation caused by the Iranian conflict is affecting the Council's spending against budget

Answer (Councillor Tom Plater):

Fuel prices have experienced some volatility during the first quarter of the financial year, reflecting wider economic conditions and fluctuations in global energy markets. While international events, including tensions in the Middle East, have contributed to uncertainty in fuel markets, the impact on the Council's finances has so far been limited and remains manageable.

The Council's budgeted fuel price across both the General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is approximately £1.79 per litre. Current prices are around £1.78 per litre, which is broadly in line with budget assumptions. Although the average fuel price since 1 April has been approximately £1.86 per litre, with a peak of £1.982 per litre during the first

week of April, the combined year-to-date impact on Council budgets is currently estimated at around £6,000.

As part of the Quarter 1 budget monitoring process, a prudent provision of £30,000 has been included to reflect a potential worst-case scenario should fuel prices rise again during the remainder of the year. However, prices have stabilised in recent weeks and, if that trend continues, it is unlikely that the full provision will be required.

The position will continue to be closely monitored and any significant changes will be reported through the Council's regular budget monitoring arrangements

(D) Question from Councillor Robin Parker

There are many publicly accessible automatic external defibrillators (AEDs) at locations in Stevenage. Some are free standing, whilst others are attached to buildings. Many of these were provided by local Borough or County Councillors via SBC Local Community Budgets (LCBs) or HCC Locality Budgets (LBs). Others are private and did not involve SBC or HCC.

I understand that the Neighbourhood Wardens check them regularly, which is excellent.

In the case of those provided by LCBs or LBs, what are the arrangements for funding:

- repairs to them;
- maintenance of them;
- replacements of them;
-if such actions become necessary?

Answer: (Councillor Nazmin Chowdhury)

The Council recognises the important contribution that publicly accessible Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) make in helping to save lives across our communities. Many of the AEDs installed in Stevenage have been funded through Borough Councillors' Local Community Budgets (LCBs), Hertfordshire County Council Locality Budgets (LBs), community groups and local businesses, reflecting a strong partnership approach to improving public safety.

The Council's Neighbourhood Wardens carry out regular visual checks of AEDs across the town and report any issues that require attention. For 2026/27, the Council has secured £2,500 of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding to support the repair and maintenance of AEDs where this becomes necessary. This funding will help ensure that existing units remain operational and available for public use.

At present, there is no dedicated replacement programme in place. The cost of replacing an AED is approximately £2,000 for an electrically powered unit and £3,500 for a solar-powered installation. Where a replacement is required, Members will be invited to consider support through their Local Community Budgets and the Council will also work with local businesses, community

organisations and other partners to secure contributions towards replacement and ongoing maintenance costs.

This collaborative approach has been successful in expanding the network of AEDs across Stevenage and will continue to be used to help ensure these vital community assets remain available for residents.

(E) Question from Councillor Ashley-Wren

Since March 2023 when the Council took over the management of the lakes sailing courses have remained inactive.

Are there plans to reinstate this provision that provided residents, including many young people, with opportunities to experience activities that they may otherwise not be able to access.?

Answer: (Councillor Arceno)

Sailing courses at Fairlands Valley Park ceased in 2019 while the facility was managed by the previous leisure operator, Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL), reflecting a significant decline in demand for sailing activities over a number of years.

Since the Council resumed direct management of the facility in 2023, we have explored opportunities to reintroduce sailing and have approached a number of sailing organisations and clubs across Hertfordshire to gauge interest in using the lake. To date, none have expressed an interest in establishing sailing activity at the site.

In the meantime, the Council has focused on broadening the range of water-based activities available to residents. Working with AquaParcs, we now offer activities including kayaking, paddleboarding and the inflatable obstacle course, all of which have proved popular and provide accessible opportunities for people of all ages to get active on the water.

In addition, the Council has enabled the Stevenage Sea Cadets to make regular use of the lake. Prior to 2023, access had been limited due to cost, but the revised arrangements now provide more opportunities for young people to develop confidence, teamwork and practical skills through water-based activities.

While there are currently no plans to reinstate Council-run sailing courses, we will continue to keep the position under review and would actively consider any sustainable proposals that demonstrate sufficient demand and a viable delivery model. Our priority remains ensuring that Fairlands Valley Park offers a wide range of accessible and well-used outdoor and water-based activities for local residents.

(F) Question from Councillor Clark

What actions did the Council take during recent periods of extreme heat to support council tenants, including older people, those with health conditions, and those at increased risk from heat-related illness?

Answer: (Councillor Loraine Rossati)

During the recent periods of extreme heat, the Council took a proactive approach to supporting council tenants, particularly older residents, those with underlying health conditions, and others who may have been more vulnerable to heat-related illness.

Within our Independent Living schemes, staff followed the UK Health Security Agency's Heat Health Alert guidance and significantly increased welfare support. This included additional wellbeing calls, welfare visits and regular check-ins to ensure residents were safe, well, and receiving any support they needed during the hottest periods.

Across the heat alert periods in May, June and July, the team made 2,405 additional resident contacts, completed 81 additional welfare visits, responded to 305 emergency calls, and carried out 49 additional weekend and bank holiday welfare checks. Staff also worked closely with residents to adjust activities where necessary during periods of extreme heat and ensured access to cooler communal areas where appropriate.

I would like to place on record my thanks to all of the Council's staff who went above and beyond to support residents during this period. Their commitment, professionalism and compassion helped ensure that some of our most vulnerable tenants remained safe, supported and connected throughout the heatwaves.

More widely, the Council used its website, social media channels and Customer Service Centre to share public health advice, encouraging residents to stay hydrated, keep cool and look out for neighbours who may be vulnerable. The Council also promoted water safety messages to help reduce the risks associated with swimming in open water during hot weather.

These actions reflect the Council's commitment to protecting vulnerable residents and supporting community wellbeing during periods of extreme weather

(G) Question from Councillor Jaysica Marvell

Many residents rely on council services or receive financial support at different stages of their lives, whether through social housing, council tax support, or other benefits and assistance. While these services provide an essential safety net, they're not always intended to be a permanent solution. There may also be people who aspire to become more financially independent where circumstances allow.

What is Stevenage Borough Council doing, either directly or in partnership with other organisations, to support residents on that journey by improving access to employment, skills, training, financial advice, business support and opportunities that promote greater independence and social mobility?

Answer: (Councillor Coleen De Freitas)

Supporting residents to improve their skills, access employment and achieve greater financial independence is a key priority for the Cabinet and is reflected within our Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan.

The Council's approach is underpinned by the Stevenage Works Skills Framework, which identifies where local intervention can make the greatest difference, including supporting young people in education, adults who face barriers to employment, and those looking to retrain, upskill or progress their careers. The framework is also aligned to the sectors that offer the greatest opportunities for local residents, including STEM, life sciences, advanced manufacturing, construction, health and social care.

Over the past five years, the Council has secured approximately £3.5 million of external funding to support enterprise, skills and employability initiatives in Stevenage. This investment has enabled a range of targeted programmes, events and interventions designed to help residents access training, employment and career progression opportunities.

One of the flagship programmes is Pioneering Young STEM Futures, delivered through our partnership with Mission 44. Phase Two commenced in September 2025 and is supported by £1.1 million of funding over five years. The programme is being delivered across every primary and secondary school in Stevenage and aims to inspire thousands of young people to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Through partnerships with organisations such as Airbus, young people are being introduced to opportunities in engineering, space, defence and the life sciences sector, helping to raise aspirations and improve long-term social mobility.

The Council also leads Stevenage Works, a partnership between Stevenage Borough Council, North Hertfordshire College and Jobcentre Plus. Through Stevenage Works, we ensure that the economic benefits arising from regeneration, housing investment and major construction projects are translated into tangible opportunities for local people, including jobs, apprenticeships, work experience placements and vocational training. Building on that success, we have also launched a Health and Social Care Pilot, with the first cohorts now successfully completed, helping residents access careers within one of the region's most important growth sectors.

Alongside these initiatives, we are increasing our focus on adults who are out of work, economically inactive, or facing barriers to employment. This includes support for residents seeking to retrain, change career or build new skills in response to a changing economy. Through partnerships with local, countywide and national organisations, we continue to provide access to

employment support, skills programmes, careers advice, business support and financial inclusion initiatives, building on the foundations established through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Together, this work is helping to create clearer pathways into education, training and employment, ensuring that more residents can benefit from the opportunities being generated by Stevenage's growth. By connecting people with the skills, support and opportunities they need to succeed, we are helping residents build greater independence, improve their life chances and contribute to the continued prosperity of our town

(H) Question from Councillor Tom Wren

The recent announcement of £20m of Pride of Place funding is fantastic news for the St Nicholas neighbourhood. What plans does the council have to deliver much needed improvements in the other areas of the town?

Answer: (Councillor Richard Henry)

It is indeed fantastic news to see such significant investment coming into Stevenage. The £20 million Pride in Place award provides an opportunity to make a real and lasting difference in St. Nicholas over a ten-year period. It represents a step change in the way place-based investment is being approached, moving away from smaller amounts of funding spread across wider areas over shorter periods and instead focusing substantial, long-term investment in communities with significant local need to support lasting generational change.

St. Nicholas was identified through a national process, using the methodology set out in the fund's publicly available prospectus. Neighbourhoods were assessed using a combination of the Index of Multiple Deprivation and the Community Needs Index, considering factors including access to services, community infrastructure, civic participation and community cohesion. Although we would all welcome this level of investment being available across more of Stevenage, funding of this scale can only support a limited number of places nationally.

Alongside Pride in Place, the Council continues to secure and invest funding that benefits neighbourhoods across the town. Members will remember that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund was allocated across Stevenage and supported locally identified priorities through our Co-operative Neighbourhoods programme. We also continue to invest through Local Community Budgets, which enable ward councillors and residents to deliver local projects, the Climate Change Community Fund, which supports community-led environmental initiatives, and Community Infrastructure Levy funding, which helps provide local infrastructure and neighbourhood improvements.

This neighbourhood investment sits alongside a much broader programme of delivery across Stevenage. The Council's Annual Report, considered by Cabinet on 15 July, looks back at what we delivered during 2025/26 and sets

out 70 strategic priorities for the year ahead. These include continued investment in our council housing stock, building more social and affordable homes, exploring further opportunities for neighbourhood regeneration and progressing our ambitious town centre regeneration programme, including the new Sports and Leisure Centre, ensuring investment continues to benefit communities across the whole town.