

# Public Document Pack



## EXECUTIVE

**Date: Thursday, 12 October 2023**

**Time: 2.00pm**

**Location: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage**

**Contact: Ian Gourlay (01438) 242703**

**committees@stevenage.gov.uk**

Members: Councillors: R Henry (Chair), J Thomas (Vice-Chair), S Barr, L Briscoe, J Hollywell, Mrs J Lloyd, L Rossati and S Speller.

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## AGENDA

### PART I

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**2. MINUTES - 20 SEPTEMBER 2023**

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 20 September 2023 for signature by the Chair.

Pages 5 – 14

**3. MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES**

To note the following Minutes of meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees –

Environment & Economy Select Committee – 4 September 2023

Pages 15 – 22

**4. CLIMATE CHANGE - ANNUAL UPDATE OCTOBER 2023**

To consider the Climate Change Annual Update – October 2023.

Pages 23 – 50

**5. HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY**

To consider a proposed revised and updated Housing Allocation Policy.

Pages 51 – 172

**6. STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN - MAKING STEVENAGE EVEN BETTER**

To consider a draft of the updated Stevenage Borough Council Corporate Plan.

Pages 173 – 180

**7. CO-OPERATIVE COMMERCIAL AND INSOURCING STRATEGY 2023 - 2026**

To consider a proposed Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy for 2023 - 2026.

Pages 181 – 212

**8. TOWNS FUND - PROGRAMME DELIVERY UPDATE**

To consider an update report regarding the Towns Fund Programme delivery.

Pages 213 – 268

**9. URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

To consider any Part I business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

**10. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

To consider the following motions –

1. That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

**11. PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 20 SEPTEMBER 2023**

To approve as a correct record the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 20 September 2023 for signature by the Chair.

Pages 269 - 270

**12. CO-OPERATIVE COMMERCIAL AND INSOURCING STRATEGY 2023 - 2026: HIGH LEVEL ACTION PLAN, INSOURCING ROAD MAP AND CHANGES TO KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

To consider the proposed high level action plan, insourcing road map and changes to Key Performance Indicators relating to the Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy 2023 – 2026.

Pages 271 - 294

**13. TOWNS FUND - SPORTS AND LEISURE HUB PROGRESSION**

To consider a report regarding progression of the Towns Fund Scheme for the provision of a new Sports and Leisure Hub.

Pages 295 - 328

## **14. URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

To consider any Part II business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

**NOTE: Links to Part 1 Background Documents are shown on the last page of the individual report, where this is not the case they may be viewed by using the following link to agendas for Executive meetings and then opening the agenda for Thursday, 12 October 2023 –**

<http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/have-your-say/council-meetings/161153/>

Agenda Published 3 October 2023

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## STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

### EXECUTIVE MINUTES

**Date: Wednesday, 20 September 2023**

**Time: 2.00pm**

**Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage**

**Present:** Councillors: Richard Henry (Chair), Jeannette Thomas (Vice-Chair), Sandra Barr, Lloyd Briscoe, Jackie Hollywell and Loraine Rossati.

**Start / End** Start Time: 2.00pm  
**Time:** End Time: 3.15pm

#### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs Joan Lloyd and Simon Speller.

The Leader also submitted apologies for absence on behalf of the Chief Executive who, together with Councillor Speller, was attending the East of England Net Zero Conference in Cambridge.

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **2 MINUTES - 18 JULY 2023**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 18 July 2023 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

#### **3 MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEES AND SELECT COMMITTEES**

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Minutes of meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees be noted –

Environment & Economy Select Committee – 6 July 2023

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 24 July 2023

Community Select Committee – 26 July 2023

#### **4 FUTURE COUNCIL 2025 TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME SAVINGS UPDATE**

The Executive considered a report in respect of an update on the Future Council 2025 Transformation Programme savings.

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation, the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure and IT advised that the report sought approval to proposed changes in both the customer services location and opening times. She

commented that since the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of people visiting customer services 'in person' had fallen from an average 78 of customers a day in Q1 2019 to 7 in Q1 2023. The existing space was now oversized for the number of visitors and customers coming into the centre. Another costly and confusing issue for the customer was that there were two entrances to Daneshill House. With reduced numbers coming into the centre, it was considered that this was the right time to change the service offering. It was therefore proposed that the customer service centre operations be moved to the main reception entrance of Daneshill House.

The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure and IT stated that, in addition to the proposed re-location, there was an opportunity to align the Customer Services opening hours with those of neighbouring councils and hence reduce the need for two staffing shifts to deliver the 8am-5pm opening times. The proposed opening times would be 9am-5pm for both in person visits and telephone contact.

The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure and IT referred to the ongoing transformation work outlined in the report on the proposed changes to community advice and support, housing, and localities teams as part of activity-based review of services. These changes would further embed the Co-operative Neighbourhood model, enabling close working relationships with communities to help resolve problems, maintain a visible and proactive presence, and help Council teams to work effectively together. The activity-based service reviews would also deliver efficient services and efficiencies.

In response to Members' questions, officers commented as follows:

- the majority of visitors to the Customer Service Centre (CSC) had pre-arranged appointments. Once the CSC had moved there would be a member of staff based in the Main Reception to greet customers and point them in the right direction as to how their enquiry could be resolved; and
- there would continue to be self-service PCs in the CSC, with staff on hand to assist customers if required.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the change of location of the customer service centre to the main reception entrance of Daneshill House be approved.
2. That the change of opening hours of customer services from 8am - 5pm to 9pm – 5pm be approved.
3. That the potential savings to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and General Fund in support of the Medium Term Financial Strategy be noted.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## 5 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE - QUARTER 1 2023/24

The Executive considered a report in respect of Corporate Performance for Quarter 1 (April – June 2023) of 2023/24.

The Leader of the Council advised that this was the first quarter of reporting in 2023/24, and therefore also the first time that Members would be considering the new Corporate Performance Suite as agreed by the Executive in July 2023.

The Leader of the Council explained that the performance suite for 2023/24 had been refined so that it focused not only on new regulatory requirements and the Council's significant investment in social housing, but also those areas which residents had told the Council mattered to them the most, namely the environment and climate change; anti-social behaviour; provision and maintenance of homes; and delivery of good local services. He added that these measures had been classified as 'Community Measures', and that there were 13 (out of 35) indicators which would be regularly highlighted and communicated to residents throughout the year.

The Leader of the Council commented that, to help clarify and provide context to performance, the FTFC milestones and strategic measures had (for the first time) been brought together to provide a complete picture of progress against the 5 current strategic priorities of the FTFC programme.

The Leader of the Council stated that, where there was a need to improve performance, the report explained the challenges faced and mitigations being applied. These areas would require specific attention and active management by officers going forward. This was reflected in the report recommendations, which were being closely monitored by Senior Management and the relevant Portfolio Holders.

The Deputy Chief Executive gave a presentation concerning the Quarter 1 2023/24 report, and commented that of the 35 Corporate Performance Indicators, 2 were at Amber status, 3 were at Red, and a number of new measures were being baselined during 2023/24. He outlined the action taken to address the 3 Red Indicators, namely Homelessness Preventions; Number of affordable homes delivered; and Number of Voids returned by contractor.

The Deputy Chief Executive then summarised the Future Town Future Council (FTFC) performance highlights throughout the Quarter, under the headings of Transforming Our Town; More Social and Affordable Housing; Co-operative Neighbourhoods; Making Your Money Count; and a Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town.

The Deputy Chief Executive concluded by referring to some of the community measures for Quarter 1, which included an 18.6% decrease in anti-social behaviour cases and a small decrease in the number of fly-tipping cases compared to the same period last year. Furthermore, 55% of the Council's Housing Stock had an EPC rating of C or above, 82.44% of Council homes met the national Decent Homes standard, and the Council had provided 339 new homes since 2014 (with a target of

reaching 394 for Quarter 2).

In respect of the good local services community measure, the Deputy Chief Executive reported that there had been over 22,000 visits from children to the Council's Everyone Active-managed leisure facilities; 85.5% of complaints were responded to within deadline; 88% of respondents were satisfied with the Customer Services Centre; and 99.45% of residential bins had been collected.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Equalities stated that she was pleased with the reduction in anti-social behaviour. She thanked and commended SBC officers and the Police for their excellent partnership working in this area.

In reply to Members' questions, officers replied as follows:

- there had been positive outcomes with recent recruitment processes in some service areas, including the appointments of a new Assistant Director for Housing Compliance, Repairs and Building Safety and a new Head of Building Safety. The Housing Repairs Service still had recruitment challenges, both to management roles and specialist tradespeople. Strategic Directors were soon to meet with Assistant Directors to monitor the use of agency/temporary staff, although it was acknowledged that the current employment market was very competitive; and
- the Cartref site referred to in Appendix A to the report had been used temporarily as a depot/storage area in connection with the Major Repairs Contract and was owned by the Council. Should a scheme be developed, a planning application would be submitted and consulted upon in the usual manner.

The Leader drew attention to the Council's green credentials by referring to the recent fitting of solar panels on to seven of the Council's refuse lorries. As well as savings on fuel, the vehicles would save a considerable amount of Carbon Dioxide emissions in the coming years.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development welcomed the progress toward the completion of Helston House, with 29 new homes being delivered, and was appreciative of the community open day that took place in September. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that it was anticipated that the first occupants of the new eco-friendly Helston House development would be moving in during October 2023.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the service performance against 35 corporate performance measures and delivery of key milestones in Quarter 1 2023/24 through the Future Town Future Council Programme (Appendix A to the report) be noted.
2. That the Council's performance as demonstrated through the 13 Community Measures (Appendix B to the report) be noted.
3. That the performance challenges in relation to homelessness preventions, number of homes provided, and voids (Section 4.2 of the report) be noted, and the planned measures to improve performance be endorsed.

4. That the strategic risk updates (Section 6 of the report) be noted.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **6 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2024/25**

The Executive considered a report in respect of the proposed Council Tax Support Scheme for 2023/24.

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development advised that the recommendation in the report was to retain the current 8.5% maximum liability for those on maximum benefit (working aged claimants).

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development stated that the report also recommended looking at the scheme again early in the next municipal year (2024/25) to see if a more significant proportion of the town's households had moved to Universal Credit (UC). If so, the scheme may need to be amended in future years.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development commented that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its July 2023 meeting, had supported the proposal to continue with the existing scheme for 2024/25. However, there was a further recommendation in the report that post-Annual Council in May 2024, a policy Overview and Scrutiny meeting be held to determine whether there had been a transition to UC and whether the scheme needed to be updated for future years beyond 2024/25.

The Strategic Director (CF) agreed to provide all Members with a Briefing Note to use when advising residents about the Council Tax Support Scheme, including signposting them to the Council's online tool that they could use to determine eligibility for support under the Scheme.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 24 July 2023 to retain the current Council Tax Support Scheme for April 2024 be approved.
2. That a policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting be held post- Annual Council in May 2024 to determine whether there has been a transition to Universal Credit and a need to adapt the existing Scheme, as set out in Sections 4.4 - 4.5 of the report.
3. That the directive contained in the Social Security Administration Act 1992 be used to disregard, in full, awards of War Widows, War Disablement and Armed Forces Compensation when determining entitlement for Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax support.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*  
*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **7 GENERAL FUND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE (2023/24 - 2027/28)**

The Executive considered a report in respect of an update on the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 – 2027/28.

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development advised that the report identified the level of medium term inflation and other pressures for the General Fund and the consequently £3.2Million amount of ‘balancing the budget savings’ required for the three year period between 2024/25 - 2026/27. The MTFS identified the need for £1.23Million to be found through a combination of savings, efficiencies, new surplus income and transformation in 2024/25.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development stated that the Council’s inflationary pressures were projected to be £1.4Million next year before the other cost increases which were set out in the report. Increases in Council Tax and core resources were predicted to be £367,000, highlighting the reason why councils across the country had to continue to find innovative ways to balance their budgets.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development explained that Minimum risk assessed balances for 2024/25 were estimated to be £3.5Million. The projected year end balance for 2024/25 was estimated to be £4.3Million which was above the minimum amount required. This would result in a £310,000 draw on general reserves, with an additional £1.941Million of allocated reserves available.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development referred to a specific recommendation in the report to permit officers to commit to underwrite the detailed design stage (known as RIBA Stage 3) to enable final design and construction pricing for the Swingate site (Plot A), ahead of entering into the joint venture with Mace and the subsequent start on site within 2023/24.

The Strategic Director (CF) drew attention to the increasing number of Section 114 Notices being issued to local authorities across the country, which emphasised the difficulties being experienced by councils in balancing their budgets. It was fortunate that SBC was not in a Section 114 position, although the identification of savings and efficiencies continued to be challenging year on year.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the change to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) principles, as outlined in Paragraph 3.11 and as amended in Paragraph 4.9.11 of the report, be approved.
2. That, for modelling purposes, Council Tax increases be set at the threshold allowed assumed at 2.99%, subject to any change in Government rules, in

order to help achieve a balanced budget, as set out in Paragraph 4.6.8 of the report.

3. That the updated inflation assumptions used in the MTFs, as set out in Section 4 of the report, be approved.
4. That the recommendation set out in Paragraph 4.3.4 of the report to transfer a maximum of £225,000 from the Business Rates Reserve should the SG1 Swingate site Joint Venture not proceed, be approved.
5. That the approach to “Balancing the Budget” options, as set out in Section 4.8 of the report, be approved.
6. That an amount of £300,000 for 2024/25 be approved for inclusion in the budget setting process to support the Transformation Fund, to help deliver the Balancing the Budget Target, as set out in Paragraph 4.8.3 of the report.
7. That a Balancing the Budget Target of £3.2Million (of which £1.23Million relates to 2024/25) be approved for the period 2024/25 – 2026/27, as set out in Section 4.9 of the report.
8. That General Fund growth be only approved for the Council’s FTFC priorities and the growth allowance included in the 2024/25 budget be £75,000. Growth above that level will need to be funded by further savings in addition to the £3.2Million target identified.
9. That a minimum level of balances for the General Fund of £3.50Million be approved for 2023/24, as set out in Paragraph 4.10.8 of the report.
10. That the MTFs be regularly reviewed and revised to reflect any material financial pressures so forecasts are updated and re-presented to the Executive for approval.
11. That the Trade Unions and staff be consulted on the key messages contained within the MTFs and more specifically when drawing up any proposals where there is a risk of redundancy.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **8 FIRST QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2023/24**

The Executive considered a report in respect of the First Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2023/24.

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development advised that, for Quarter 1, the report highlighted a net decrease for the General Fund of £273,020 and a net pressure of £154,510 for the Housing Revenue Account.

The Executive noted that both General Fund and HRA remained within their variation limits, as delegated to the Executive by Council.

It was **RESOLVED**:

### **General Fund**

1. That the 2023/24 First Quarter projected net decrease in General Fund expenditure of £273,020 be approved.
2. That it be noted that the cumulative changes made to the General Fund net budget remains within the £400,000 increase variation limit delegated to the Executive.
3. That the proposed movement on reserves, as detailed in Paragraph 4.2.1 of the report, be noted.

### **Housing Revenue Account (HRA)**

4. That the 2023/24 First Quarter projected net pressure in HRA expenditure of £154,510 be approved.
5. That two budget virements totalling £450,000, from planned maintenance budgets, to fund the proposed fencing works as detailed in Paragraph 4.5.9 of the report, be approved.
6. That the existing backlog of fencing works be prioritised to be completed and new fencing repairs be added to a waiting list, unless they relate to emergency repairs and those creating a health and safety risk, which will be dealt with immediately, with all other repairs being completed in order of date raised.
7. That a budget virement of £238,000 from revenue contributions to capital, for void property repair costs, be approved, as detailed at Paragraph 4.5.6 of the report.
8. That it be noted that the cumulative increases made to the HRA net budget remain within the £400,000 variation limit delegated to the Executive in the January 2023 budget report.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **9 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2022/23 AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS**

The Executive considered a report in respect of a review of the 2022/23 Annual Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators.

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development advised that the report



presented the outturn position against the parameters that were set as part of the Strategy approved in February 2022.

The Executive be noted that there were no breaches to the Treasury Management policy in 2022/23 and no Treasury Limits were breached during the year. The Council also had no liquidity difficulties.

The Assistant Director (Finance) commented that the report had been considered by the Audit Committee at its meeting held on 6 September 2023. The Audit Committee had agreed that the Strategy review be recommended by the Executive to Council for approval.

It was **RESOLVED** that the 2022/23 Annual Treasury Management Review be recommended to Council for approval.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

## **10 URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

## **11 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. That the reasons for the following reports being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

## **12 PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 18 JULY 2023**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 18 July 2023 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

## **13 STEVENAGE (SURVIVORS) AGAINST DOMESTIC ABUSE (SADA) SERVICE UPDATE**

The Executive considered a Part II report in respect of an update on the Stevenage (Survivors) Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) service.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations contained in the report be approved.

*Reason for Decision: As contained in report.*

*Other Options considered: As contained in report.*

**14 URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

**CHAIR**

## STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

### ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Monday, 4 September 2023

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

**Present:** Councillors: Rob Broom (Chair), Adam Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair), Jim Brown, Bret Facey, Conor McGrath, Sarah Mead, Claire Parris, Ellie Plater and Graham Snell.

**Start / End Time:** Start Time: 6.00pm  
End Time: 7.41pm

#### 1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received by Cllr Andy McGuinness and Baroness Taylor of Stevenage, OBE

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 2 **MINUTES - THURSDAY 6 JULY 2023**

It was **RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 6 July 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

#### 3 **INTERVIEW WITH ARRIVA BUS COMPANY**

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Michael Jennings, Area Head of Commercial for Arriva South, and Alec Bright, Arriva Network Manager for Stevenage.

The Chair asked a range of questions which were answered by Mr Jennings and included:

- Mr Jennings agreed that electric buses were the future.
- The main reasons why Arriva withdrew from the ZEBRA scheme were the impact of Covid and the financial implications from it. During Covid bus patronage reduced by three quarters and it was decided that Arriva couldn't invest into Stevenage. Instead they did invest into a new depot.
- Unfortunately there was no option to delay the government grant, as it was a take it or leave it offer and at the time during Covid it was not financially viable to invest into Stevenage. He hoped that another government grant would be available.
- He highlighted that they needed more support and needed to replace a large portion of the fleet which would require a lot of large capital investment at once.
- The ZEBRA bid was quick in becoming available and needed to be submitted

quickly with awards being made on a large scale to small areas.

- Arriva had introduced electric buses in Leicester and London, but there were no electric fleets currently in the Southeast.
- He acknowledged that there was a problem with the current service and delivery was below where it should be. He highlighted some causes for this.
- Staffing had been a big issue not only in Stevenage but across Hertfordshire. They were now fully staffed in Stevenage and had increased pay rates to £16 per hour. They had also increased starter rates and used agencies to fill any gaps in staffing.
- The depot site had been another issue. Previously they had been operating from two sites which was difficult to manage. Now they are operating from one site with the correct facilities.
- Another issue had been engineering which they were still having issues with. The current fleet was older, they had issues with getting engineering staff, and there was a lack of parts which took time to come in. He highlighted that they had an action plan which still had some way to go but they were moving forward in the right direction.

A Member asked a question regarding the average percentage of services operated and suggested this was not in line with the public perception of what had been operated. Mr Jennings agreed that the perception was negative, but it was often worse than what was operated. The impact from traffic, lack of drivers, and issues with engineering all contribute to late services and although some services were late, they still ran. He stated that ideally, they wanted to run at least 99% of services.

A Member asked a question regarding the monthly data that had been provided. Mr Jennings advised that the variations in the monthly data was affected by various factors such as school holidays, bank holidays, or how many weekends there were in a certain month.

Another Member asked why there were recruitment issues. Mr Jennings advised that there had been a challenge with drivers and engineers and had been seen across the entire bus sector not just Arriva and there were lots of reasons for this. Covid had a significant impact on this due to lifestyle changes, delayed operations, and the market changing. Brexit was also another issue as they cannot recruit from overseas anymore. They had made the job more attractive by investing in the depot and facilities, changing schedules and increasing pay rates.

A few Members asked questions about the communications through the website, app and twitter, as well as the real time information infrastructure. Mr Jennings advised that the website was good at showing the timetable, but there was a challenge in showing what was actually operating. The app gave live updates and showed what was operating but there were still limitations. Some last-minute changes aren't updated as quick. The Department for Transport had pushed for open data so other websites can access and track the data and show real time information. The real time information infrastructure was down to Hertfordshire County Council. Mr Bright also added that they had a red list of journeys that should operate daily and would take priority, for example the first or last journeys of the day.

Some Members asked questions in relation to operations in other areas such as London or Leicester. Mr Jennings advised that having electric buses in London was slightly different as Transport for London pay to operate services. Leicester also had a different market and was stronger therefore was also a good candidate for an electric fleet. Stevenage pre-covid had a strong market but it had decreased post-covid. It was also currently hard to gain investments and the business wouldn't be sustainable if an electric fleet was introduced into Stevenage. In terms of general performance there had been a mixed picture nationally and there were only a few areas which showed excellent performance. There have been major lifestyle changes in recent years, such as working from home, which changed how many people used the service. Mr Jennings didn't think bus usage would return to pre-covid levels and this was a national issue.

A few Members asked questions regarding the aging fleet in Stevenage and the use of biodiesel. Mr Jennings advised that electric vehicles were a lot more expensive and wouldn't replace diesel vehicles like for like. The biggest challenge was missed funding opportunities during covid and without funding they were more likely to get more diesel vehicles, but they already use biodiesel. They were looking nationally at what they can do to bring buses in as there was a link between the age of buses and their environmental impact. The oldest vehicle running in Stevenage was 14 years old (with two 19-year-old buses just taken out the fleet) and the average age of the fleet was 12.5 years with vehicles ranging between 9-14 years. Mr Bright added that if any investment opportunities did come towards Hertfordshire, it would come towards Stevenage. This was due to the age of the fleet as well as the potential in Stevenage.

A Member asked whether there had been an effect from the £2 fare cap. Mr Jennings advised that this had increased patronage by a small amount, and they had seen the most use from longer journeys.

A few Members asked questions regarding the practicality of electric buses within Stevenage, and it was advised:

- There were pinch points, and the biggest challenge was getting buses moving faster.
- Haycroft Road was a tight road where buses had issues, as well as roads such as Chertsey Rise were not designed for buses but remained as they were strong routes.
- Main roads and dual carriageways were good.
- There weren't problems all day, but certain areas at certain times.
- Parking was also an issue.
- They try to get buses into new developments and communicate with the developers and local councils.
- The issue with new developments was that most people who buy houses in new developments have cars and don't use buses.
- The key to new developments was to build them with buses in mind, for example no speed bumps or wider roads.
- Some developments have tight turns that make it difficult for buses to travel

the route. Ideally providing buses through Section 106 and having developments account for buses help.

- The depot was built in mind with electric vehicle charging. Ideally the buses would be charged overnight and topped up during the day.
- An electric bus can travel 180-200 miles on one charge but won't last all day.
- They could opportunity charge and charge at the end of the route.
- Technology needs to improve so bus batteries can last all day.

A Member asked what local authorities could do to make it easier for commercial providers to provide local services. Mr Jennings advised that as a commercial operator it was key to react and address quickly. Issues arise when there was a problem they cannot address, local authorities are slow to react. He also added that town vitality was key. Stevenage needs to be an attractive destination for a variety of people such as employers and shoppers. Mr Bright added that Stevenage had always been pro-bus and was one of the best towns for buses in Hertfordshire. However, it was getting harder with traffic and most households owning cars.

A Member suggested that cutting fares and increasing service would make more people use buses. Mr Jennings advised that if they increased frequency they would carry more, and if they reduced fares they would carry more. However, if they doubled the frequency, they wouldn't carry double the passengers, but it would still cost double to run.

A Member asked questions regarding the accessibility of the bus service. Mr Jennings advised that the entire fleet was fully wheelchair accessible, and some bus stops are. The next step was to make all bus stops accessible but that was down to Hertfordshire County Council. Operators are doing things locally to see what accessibility looks like and this was needed from the Department for Transport. All destination screens were electronic, and the next step was to add announcements for next stops. The Scrutiny Officer also added that they had feedback from a Hertfordshire group who work with people who are visually impaired. They raised issues around how they view boards, etc. Mr Jennings added that more work needed to be done but they had done things over the years to help understand different issues, such as guide dogs.

The Chair thanked Mr Jennings and Mr Bright for their contribution to the meeting.

#### 4 **INTERVIEW WITH BUS USER GROUP STEVENAGE (BUGS)**

The Chair welcomed to the meeting David Martin, Secretary of the Bus User Group Stevenage (BUGS).

The Chair invited Mr Martin to give an overview of the BUGS perception of the bus service across the years which included:

- The issues the bus service experienced in 2017 are not different to the issues experienced today.
- The Bus Service Act enhanced the partnership between Local Councils, County Councils, and operators. The interlink partnership was there before

but had no real power with the County Council.

- Lots of issues affect the service such as lack of drivers, seasonal changes, or holidays during the summer.
- The graphs provided from Arriva show operations from Stevenage depot, which included other longer routes out of Stevenage and generally run well. The graphs didn't represent the shorter Stevenage services and didn't reflect the complaints from residents about the local bus service.
- The open data allowed anyone to look at specific services.
- There were lots of services being dropped and the real time information wasn't available to let people know it had been cancelled.

Some Members asked questions in relation to the bus times and scheduling. Mr Martin advised that operators had to register their services with the County Council, and it took, on average, 6 weeks to implement changes. The County Council tends to rely on commercial operators to give information about which routes they want to run, although they do have some control. For example, the SB8 route had been withdrawn, but Arriva ran an evening service under contract with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC).

A Member asked how often operators consult groups within Hertfordshire. Mr Martin advised that they generally didn't. BUGs were consulted once by HCC once to develop passenger charter and bus service user plan. They didn't consult on routes and services and any changes that have happened were through grassroots campaigns, For example in Hertsmere a community investment levy fund was used to restore the bus service.

Some Members asked questions relating to the data not comparing to the experience of local passengers, as well as app usage. Mr Martin advised that passengers would rather services that came. There were many issues such as buses breaking down when they overheat, or Arriva having to take on other services and routes which created more issues with lack of drivers. The Arriva app only looks at Arriva services and was useful to see the service generally however isn't always accurate. There needed to be a multi operator zone ticket to improve service use.

A Member asked whether the improved depot would make a difference to the service and the issues it had. Mr Martin advised that the staff moral had improved with the new depot. The operations would also be better as there was an improvement in the communications and awareness.

A Member asked questions relating to the accessibility of the service. Mr Martin advised that accessibility was improving. All buses were required to have wheelchair access as a minimum. He added that the government had specified new regulations that buses would have audio and visual announcements for the next stop, as well as wheelchair users being able to see stop information. All new vehicles from November would have this built in and older vehicles would have this retrofitted.

A Member asked whether competition could help the service improve. Mr Martin advised that other bus operators did not travel on the same routes. He added that residents were interested to see other operations as they have negative perceptions

and experiences with Arriva. During Covid, Centrebus couldn't manage but worked to capacity unlike Arriva so had a more positive public perception.

Some Members asked whether the interchange had improved the service use and was working efficiently. Mr Martin advised that the interchange was working reasonably well. There were some late buses going into incorrect bays which caused issues, but this was being resolved. The real time information was the real issue and HCC were working on a new display system that would give better information. The original plans for the interchange included a mobility centre however due to Covid and the lack of funding and budgets, the space was leased to a shop. This worked well but the lack of a mobility centre was a disappointment. Mobility issues had reduced the numbers of elderly passengers, as well as Covid.

A Member asked whether bus drivers received abuse from passengers regarding the service. Mr Martin advised that social media had had a positive impact on abuse. Complaints to drivers happened from time to time, but there had been a reduction due to social media. The BUGS social media had national followers and most complaints go there rather than towards drivers.

Another Member asked whether there was any feedback from the reduction of the SB8 service. Mr Martin advised that because the service was so poor, many people hadn't noticed a difference. There had been some people contacting BUGS through social media asking for alternatives.

The Chair thanked Mr Martin for his contribution to the meeting.

It was recommended that an electric minibus should be considered to be put into place with a service running from the shops/commercial units that will be developed on the ground floor of the Guinness development, or from the Court House to the Mecca Bingo and pedestrianised shops. This would create a link from the new bus interchange to the town centre for people with mobility issues.

## 5 **UPDATED MAPPING DOCUMENT FOR THE BUS SCRUTINY REVIEW**

The Chair informed Members the next Environment and Economy Select Committee meeting would be held on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October and would also be centred around buses. They would invite Stevenage Borough Council Officers and groups from the community to attend. The Scrutiny Officer added they had confirmation from a group representing those with visual impairments and confirmation from the Irish Network.

It was **RESOLVED**: That the Committee noted the updated mapping document.

## 6 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

There was none.

## 7 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.



8 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was none.

**CHAIR**

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**Meeting** Executive

**Portfolio Area** Environment and Performance;  
Communities, Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Council

**Date** 12 October 2023



## CLIMATE CHANGE – ANNUAL UPDATE OCTOBER 2023

### KEY DECISION

**Author** Zayd Al-Jawad

**Lead Officers** Zayd Al-Jawad, Rob Gregory, Steve Dupoy

**Contact Officer** Zayd Al-Jawad, 2257

### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report builds upon the update provided to the Executive at its meetings in June and October 2022 and provides Members with an overview of the action that Stevenage Borough Council is taking to address climate change. The report also outlines further action being taken by Stevenage Borough Council, in partnership at county level through the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) and references the activities of the East of England Regional Climate Change Forum.
- 1.2 Further to this the report outlines the street level work and opportunities being undertaking to support local people to make a positive environmental change in their local area, reducing carbon and increasing support for behavioural change in local neighbourhoods.

- 1.3 Importantly the report also highlights the continuing need for further substantial legislative and financial support from Government to achieve the target for the town and Council to be net zero by 2030.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the progress being made to deliver the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan be noted, and any related matters be highlighted for the attention of the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Performance and officers.
- 2.2 That the approaches to the three SBC Pathways, Fuel & Fleet; Buildings & Assets and People & Process, as outlined in Paragraphs 3.50 - 3.91 of the report, be agreed.
- 2.3 That officers be requested to prepare a business case for the Executive to consider relating to switching as much as possible of SBC's fuel to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO), as detailed in Paragraphs 3.59 and 3.60 of the report.

## **3 CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE Summary**

- 3.1 For the geographic area of Stevenage, including everyone and everything in it, there was a slight 2.90% increase in total emissions in 2021 compared to 2020 levels which most likely relates to the pandemic coming to an end. However, when compared to 2018, our baseline year, emissions are still 14.5% below those levels.
- 3.2 Pathway 1 has been developed looking at SBC's Fuel and Fleet carbon emissions. SBC have introduced a new EV van and got solar panels fitted to all seven of our refuse trucks. SBC have also detailed options for migrating the fleet to low or zero carbon, with options to changing the fuel to deliver a large carbon savings before 2030.
- 3.3 Pathway 2 Buildings and Assets and Pathway 3 People and Process is underway with a focus on bidding for capital low carbon investments.
- 3.4 Extensive work on carbon reduction has been undertaken across the region with the EELGA and HCCSP.
- 3.5 The first Topic Reference group is up and running, joining those with a technical interest in climate change with other key stakeholders to collaboratively work on solutions. Three Dragon's Den local environmental improvement schemes have been approved.

### **Update**

- 3.6 Officers have been working with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance to review the current Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, the existing and potential engagement activities, projects and schemes which are underway or could be brought forward, and the overall steps that will be needed to accelerate our collective efforts to achieve the aim of a net zero town and Council by 2030.

- 3.7 At the heart of our efforts to tackle the climate crisis is a plan that recognises actions are needed at all levels, from coordinated international efforts such as those set out in COP27 and other global programmes, all the way through to individual actions and choices, and changes that can be made in places and neighbourhoods in which people live.
- 3.8 At the global level, significant funding commitments have been made, for both supporting countries to transition away from greenhouse gas emissions, and to investment in new low carbon technologies. The COP27 in Egypt ended with a breakthrough to assist vulnerable countries dealing with losses and damages caused by climate change. However, no substantial new initiatives were agreed at the summit to reduce emissions and limit temperature rise to 1.5°C.
- 3.9 On the other hand, a clear emissions gap between current national climate plans and what is needed to meet world’s target is broadly recognised. The Glasgow Climate Pact called on all countries to present stronger national action plans by 2024. 137 countries committed to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030, backed by \$19.2bn in funding. Additionally, 103 countries, including 15 major emitters, signed up to the Global Methane Pledge, which aims to reduce methane emissions by 30% by 2030, compared to 2020 levels. Methane is responsible for a third of current global warming from human activities. Finally, over 30 countries, six major vehicle manufacturers and some cities, set out their determination for all new car and van sales to be zero-emission by 2040 globally and 2035 in leading markets.
- 3.10 This report highlights some of Stevenage Borough Council’s points of engagement and action, from reflecting global trends, through to actions in our local economy, and the active engagement needed in our local communities.

**Our new focus: The 9 levels for Climate Change Strategy**

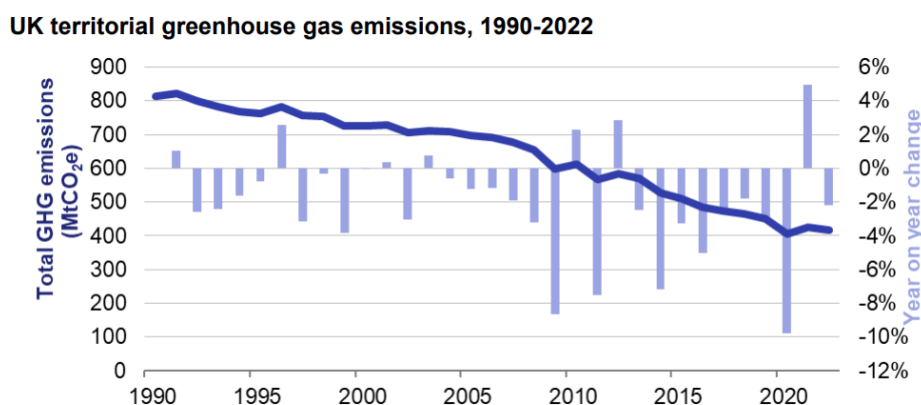


**Levels 1 and 2: Global and national level climate action**

- 3.11 The global pandemic and associated ‘lockdowns’ had a significant impact on climate change during 2020 – 2021. In fact, emissions declined at the fastest

rate on record in 2020, an estimated 13% drop. Despite increases in some emissions as a result of UK's ongoing recovery from the pandemic, 2022 presented a drop in emissions, owing mostly to a reduction in fuel utilisation to heat buildings. This was primarily due to 2022 being significantly warmer than 2021, although higher energy prices may also have played a role. Total GHG emissions in the UK are provisionally estimated to have decreased by 2.2% in 2022 compared to 2021, to 417.1 million tCO<sub>2e</sub>. Compared to 2019, the last pre-pandemic year, total GHG emissions in 2022 were down 7.4%, and 48.7% lower than in 1990. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the residential sector decreased in 2022, whereas CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from transport rised.

- 3.12 The long-term trend in UK territorial GHG emissions from 1990 to 2022 is outlined in the table below:



Source: Department for Energy Security & Net Zero, National Statistics

- 3.13 Continuous monitoring of these reductions allows us to see how much of these carbon savings can be maintained and further improved, in a way that does not exacerbate energy poverty to lower income households, or limit access to employment and good quality housing.
- 3.14 While it is challenging to forecast the implications of this in terms of energy consumption and carbon emissions in the medium-term, the dramatic increase in energy prices for individuals and businesses alike is likely to result in behavioural and production changes. While this may limit energy use in the short term, there will be profound effects on us all, particularly highlighting the urgent need for government-level initiatives to promote insulation, retrofitting, and energy efficiency as well as alternative forms of sustainable energy supply.
- 3.15 Early in 2023, the UK Government has released an independent review on its Net Zero Strategy to reaching net zero by 2050, and its responses to that review. This process has highlighted the important role of local authorities, communities, and individuals to deliver net zero, and the problems hampering them. These problems include lack of policy clarity, capital waiting for investible propositions, infrastructure bottlenecks and delays in the planning system.
- 3.16 Net zero is recognised as the critical growth opportunity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with more than 90% of global GDP currently covered by a net zero target. Global market opportunities of £1 trillion for British businesses and the potential creation of 480,000 jobs by 2030 have been identified.

- 3.17 Alongside the importance of new technologies and innovation, the review has highlighted the problems hampering the net zero delivery and has outlined strategies to face them. These strategies include defining clear plans and strategies; unblocking the planning system and reforming the relationship between central and local planning promoting place-based action; defining a comprehensive government financing strategy by the end of 2023, giving long-term clarity, and simplifying the current disjointed, unfair, and expensive local net zero funding landscape; and reviewing incentives from HMT for investment in decarbonisation, including via tax system and capital allowances.
- 3.18 In September 2023, the UK Government announced its decision to ease the transition to electric vehicles, allowing the sales of petrol and diesel cars and vans until 2035. Even after that, buying and selling those vehicles second-hand will be possible. In this announcement, the Government also stated that no measures will be imposed on replacing current gas boilers with heat pumps. The switch will only have to be made when replacing the boiler anyway, and even then, not until 2035. An exemption will be introduced for households for whom this switch will be hardest, so that they will never have to switch at all. On the other hand, the Government announced that the Boiler Upgrade Scheme, which gives people cash grants to replace their boiler, will be increased by 50% to £7,500. Finally, the Government specified that current plans on energy efficiency requirements for properties will be scrapped, and while the Government will continue to subsidise energy efficiency, no household would face compulsory upgrades.

### **Level 3 - Businesses**

- 3.19 Many of the large businesses in Stevenage are well on their way to meeting their own corporate objectives to be net zero by 2030 or even earlier. Previously we have surveyed businesses along Gunnels Wood Road, including GSK, MBDA, Fujitsu and Wenta. Local businesses including HCC and Flamingo Foods are investing significant amounts of money in Stevenage to lower their carbon emissions.
- 3.20 Case Study: The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) Stevenage, one of Stevenage's largest employers, has undergone a full redevelopment that makes it technologically smarter and more sustainable for the benefit of the 580 people who work there. The prominent red-bricked building situated at the entrance of Stevenage's leisure park was transformed top to bottom over the course of 2021-22.
- 3.21 The project started whilst employees were working from home during the pandemic, providing an opportunity to complete the work in a safe and efficient way, as well as speeding up the project timescale. The new-look building features innovative and technologically smart workspaces with accessibility, sustainability and employee well-being as a key focus for the plans.
- 3.22 Richard Mundy, Head of Facilities at the IET, said: *"The environment in which our colleagues work is really important to us as it underpins everyone's wellbeing and the inclusive, progressive culture we have. It is our*

*commitment to provide working space that brings out the very best in everyone and the work that they do. We wanted to design a building with the future in mind – one that gives our employees an intuitive, modern and fully accessible space in which they can thrive as well as playing our part to reduce our impact on the environment by ensuring our new building is built and run in a sustainable way”.*

- 3.23 During the decant, zero waste went to landfill, with items such as office furniture and building materials being sorted and recycled. The refurbishment achieved BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) certification to ensure construction is carried out sustainably. The Council is working with them to share best practice and learning.
- 3.24 Last year, the Council agreed to fund 100 Gold Memberships for a Wenta-run net zero programme (Action Zero Programme), which supports local small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to understand what can be done about climate change; identify the business opportunities and risks arising from climate change; and reduce their carbon footprint. It also helps SMEs calculate the business and climate benefits of net zero and understand what becoming “net zero” can mean for the future of their business. Action Zero forms part of the Council’s measures to help businesses to cut their emissions and support the town to be net zero by 2030. 94 business have already signed up to the programme.
- 3.25 Through the Community Renewal Funding programme, the Council has been supporting micro businesses and voluntary organisations through the provision of workshops to support sustainability planning and how to identify cost savings as well as running a ‘Meet the Buyer” campaign. By way of background the Community Renewal Fund was a UK Government fund which provided £220 million nationally as additional funding to help organisations prepare for the introduction of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- 3.26 The Council is currently aiding the delivery of UK Shared Prosperity Fund supported activities to support local business investment and increase private sector investment in growth-enhancing activities, including new-to-firm innovation, and adopting productivity-enhancing, energy-efficient and low carbon technologies and techniques. The “Meet the Buyer” campaign should help businesses become more sustainable, increase their competitiveness, and better understand the sustainability needs of buyers so they can tailor their services to help businesses meet those needs. This process would enable the Council’s to meet its responsibility to promote sustainable development in the area and support efforts to reach its climate goals.

**Levels 4 and 5: Regional / Countywide - Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership and at the East of England level.**

- 3.27 A crucial element of the Council’s approach is to work with other local government partners to help secure investment, develop business cases and to find ways to collectively reduce their carbon footprints and improve sustainability. This is a joint endeavour, bringing together our resources to help achieve the greatest impact.



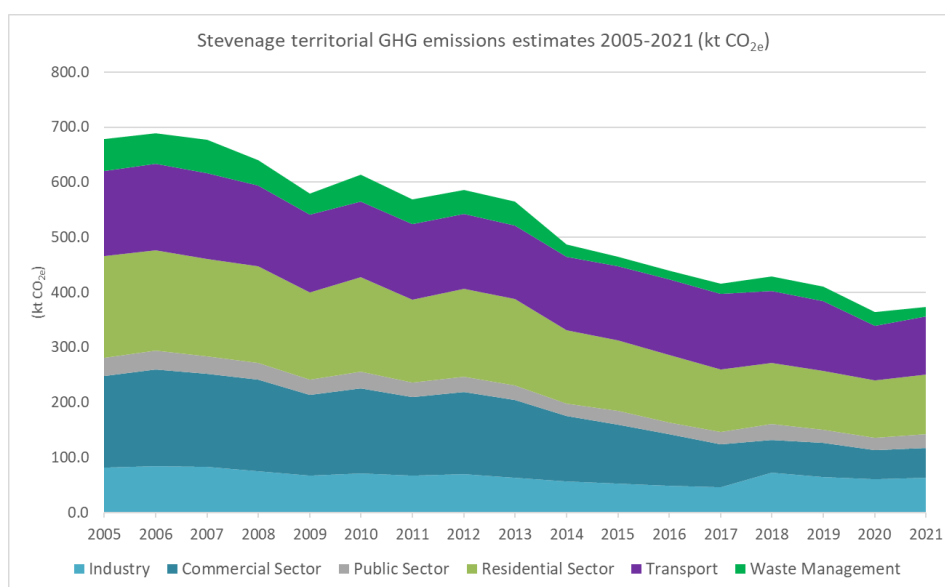
- 3.28 The Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) was launched in 2020 and consists of all 10 Districts, the County Council, and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Performance attends these meetings with the Assistant Director for Planning & Regulatory Services.
- 3.29 SBC is a proactive participant on HCCSP, and the Chief Executive is the lead Officer sponsor at County level. The Council is supporting delivery in relation to five of the six priority themes (as set out below) for which detailed action plans have been developed and implemented:
- Biodiversity
  - Carbon reduction
  - Transport
  - Water
  - Behavioural Change
  - Climate Change Adaption
- 3.30 Much of the strategic work is being focused through HCCSP to harness the power of working together at county level. There are good linkages between the HCCSP and SBC key themes noting that one of the crucial aims of the HCCSP was to not duplicate efforts at local levels.
- 3.31 Some examples of work undertaken via HCCSP are set out below:
- Biodiversity Baseline – joint procurement and a county-wide reference point for the imminent development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain.
  - Solar Together – joint communications and county-wide coordination of this solar panel scheme, facilitating domestic energy generation installations at scale.
  - Your Tree, Our Future – joint communications, logistical and funding support enabled over 46,000 trees to be given away to Hertfordshire residents in Year 1 of the scheme. Year 2 launched in mid-June 2023, expecting a further 59,000 trees to be available.
  - LEVI Funding - In September 2023 the Council, through HCCSP, also obtained LEVI funding to support EV charging in the borough.
- 3.32 Via HCCSP the Council has also obtained training and capacity-building for councillors and officers across a range of relevant subjects including sustainability for planning experts, adaptation, and climate change.
- 3.33 HCCSP is increasingly being looked to for coordination and leadership in the sustainability sphere.
- 3.34 Similarly, local authorities are being approached by businesses who wish to understand how they can fulfil statutory obligations (e.g., offsetting) and expecting local authorities to be at the forefront of these strategies.
- 3.35 Reflecting on these expectations and recognising the more fertile landscape for ambition and action outside of individual Local Authorities', HCCSP is proactively mapping the six identified priority themes shown at 3.29 to seek

to identify the most appropriate organisation to deliver against specific objectives.

- 3.36 This revised approach would allow updates and progress reports to be shared with relevant stakeholders to improve navigation and awareness within what can be a complex multi layered operating environment.
- 3.37 At the June HCCSP meeting Members also considered the partnerships future role in the context of the emerging new county level “Missions” that are being drawn up by the Herts Growth Board (HGB) one of which is focused on Climate Change along with the Regional Climate Change Forum (RCCF) work programme (as shown at 3.38 below). It is important that the activities at local, county, and regional levels are as joined up as possible to ensure we are working as effectively and efficiently as possible. It is also important to remain cognisant with what is happening at national and international levels where there could be local impacts.
- 3.38 The Regional Climate Change Forum (RCCF) is organised by the East of England LGA. SBC’s Chief Executive is the lead officer for the region.
- 3.39 Post completing a regional baseline assessment the RCCF has published an Action Plan which includes eight priorities as set out below:
- Priority 1: Implement the RCCF regional 'switchboard' linking and facilitating the sharing of intelligence, requests, best practice, resources and opportunities
  - Priority 2: Explore with Officers opportunities for regional green inward investment and collateral
  - Priority 3: Share regional sustainable development best practice guidance for LA's Local Plans
  - Priority 4: Enable LA members to explore the widest range of opportunities to bring in funding for retrofit activity
  - Priority 5: Share best practice on climate resilience and emergency planning for extreme weather events
  - Priority 6: Explore opportunities for joint procurement and support the sharing of sustainable procurement best practice
  - Priority 7: Share best practice on effective public communication and behaviour change activity
  - Priority 8: Lead government lobbying and advocacy on behalf of the region
- 3.40 Hertfordshire is the nominated authority leading on the Adaptation workstream in relation to Priority 5 and is working alongside Suffolk and Cambridgeshire on Behaviour Change and Communication in relation to Priority 7.
- 3.41 The East of England Net Zero Conference took place on 20 September 2023 in Cambridge and was attended by the Portfolio Holder and SBC officers.

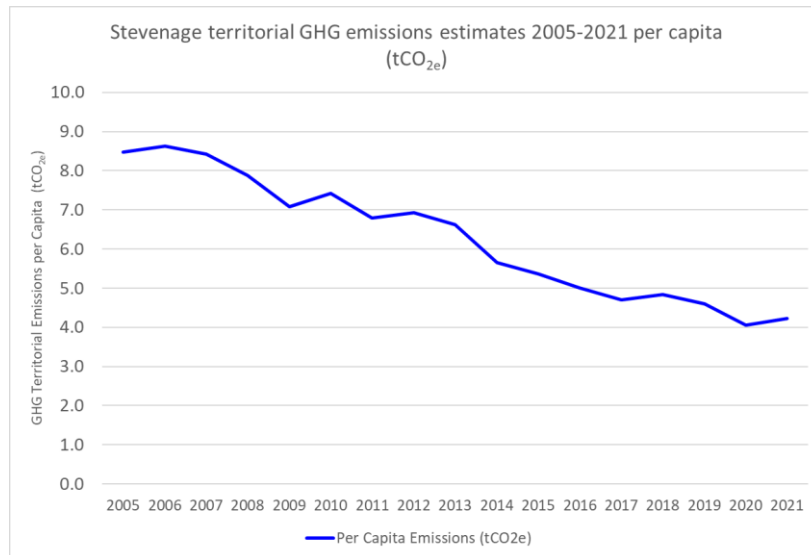
## Level 6: Stevenage Level

- 3.42 Central government data for Stevenage's own emissions for 2021 have been released and is shown below. Although the effect of the pandemic resulted in a sharper than average fall in emissions which was a benefit from a climate change point of view, the ensuing recovery has started to impact on the 2021 data. The 2022 figures will be release in the next 8-9 months and are likely to show further increases in emissions as economic activity further recovers as was the case after the 2008/2010 down turns.
- 3.43 Based on the last published information from the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), updated on 29 June 2023, the territorial GHG emissions trajectory for Stevenage is shown below.



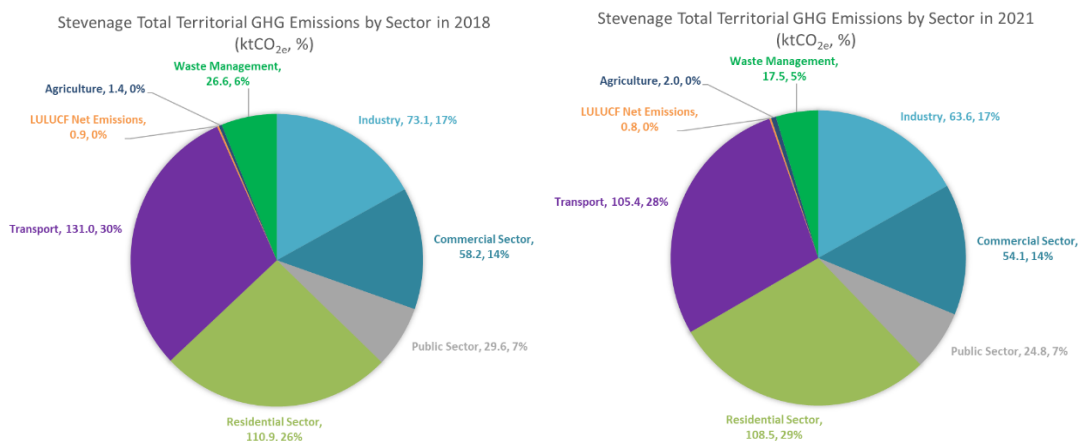
Source: Based on Department for Energy Security & Net Zero data.

- 3.44 The information shows a slight 2.90% increase in total emissions in 2021 (376.7 kt CO<sub>2e</sub>) compared to 2020 levels (365.8 kt CO<sub>2e</sub>), primarily driven by increases in the public (+8.8%), transport (+6.3%), industrial (+5.2%), domestic (+3.5%), and commercial (+3.1%) sectors. However, when compared to 2018, our baseline year, emissions (431.7 kt CO<sub>2e</sub>) are still 14.5% below those levels.
- 3.45 As noted above the figures for 2021 may well be affected due to the lockdown restrictions and subsequent decline in both industrial production and travel. These figures are produced by central government taking into account a complex array of energy use data and are about two years behind.
- 3.46 Total territorial GHG emissions (tCO<sub>2e</sub>) per capita showed a similar behaviour, with slightly deeper decrease in 2021 emissions levels compared to 2018 (-14.68%), as shown in the figure below.



Source: Based on Department for Energy Security & Net Zero data.

3.47 When 2021 Stevenage total territorial emissions are compared with 2018 levels by economic sector, no significant change can be identified, but a decrease in all the major emitters sectors is evident as shown below.



Source: Based on Department for Energy Security & Net Zero (ex BEIS) data.

3.48 The Stevenage Climate Change Strategy is based around 8 themes, reflecting the breath of services offered by the Council. The 8 themes are shown on the next page and detailed in paragraph 3.9The Council’s delivery against the key activities agreed by Executive against those themes is set out below. The traffic light colouring (red, yellow, and green) depicts the progress made against each one.

## Businesses

Lobby government to support our businesses and a green recovery.

Using our network's shared knowledge to support SMEs to adapt to climate change opportunities.

Share knowledge and improved ways or working across our business community to reduce carbon.

## Homes

Energy efficient housing and subsidies for public and private homes.

Planning Policy for zero carbon homes on all large scale developments.

Zero carbon development at the Station Gateway.

Fully electric/zero carbon heat and power on SBC lead developments.

## Construction & Regeneration

Design a carbon neutral new civic hub.

Work with regeneration partners that are committed to zero carbon operations.

Fully electric SG1 residential development.

Zero carbon state schools.

## Waste & Recycling

Develop a new Waste Strategy promoting reduction, reuse and recycling.

Zero waste to landfill or incineration.

With HCC produce biogas.

## People

SBC will produce a Climate Change Comms Plan to help education and inform our residents.

Continue to work with youth groups, Youth Council and local schools to help both understand their climate change concerns and also empower them to make changes.

## Biodiversity

Tree protection and planting strategy.

Biodiversity Plan and Actions.

Plant over 4000 trees by 2030.

Construct at least 6 new lakes or ponds by 2030.

## Transport

Electric taxis and support to drivers to transition their fleet.

Electric buses, with expanded routes and frequencies.

With HCC, introduce workplace parking charges.

Living Streets trials.

Decarbonising the SBC fleet before 2030.

Bike and e-bike hire.

## Energy & Water

Promote cross-county purchase of renewable energy supply.

Identify opportunities for local renewable energy generation.

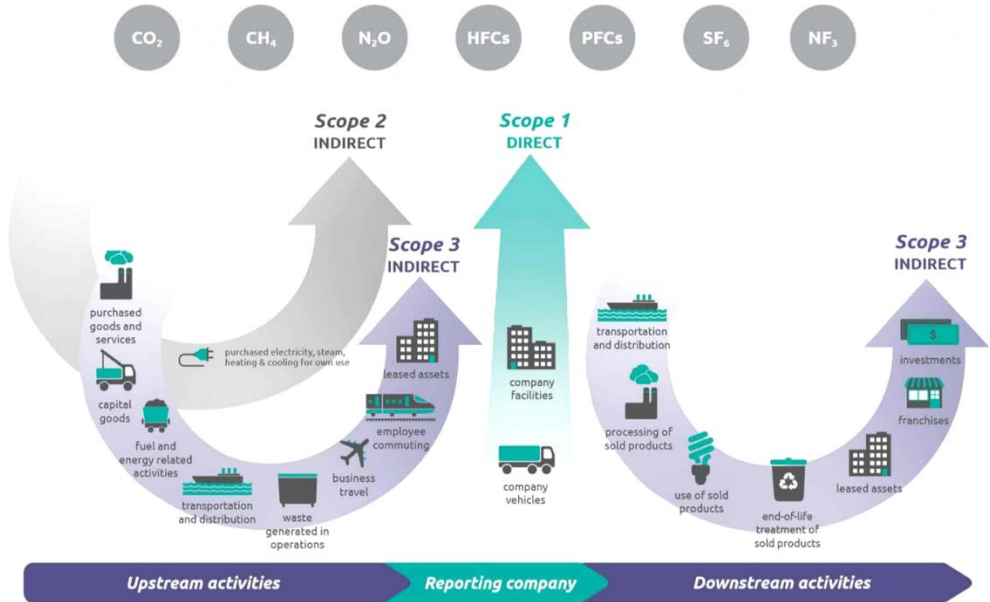
Test a Combined Heat & Power station as part of new swimming pool development.

With Affinity Water & HCC, support their move to zero carbon

3.49 Much work has been done on establishing 3 SBC pathways to zero carbon, which covers a significant amount of the Council’s direct emissions. More detail is provided in the appendix, but some summary information is set out below:

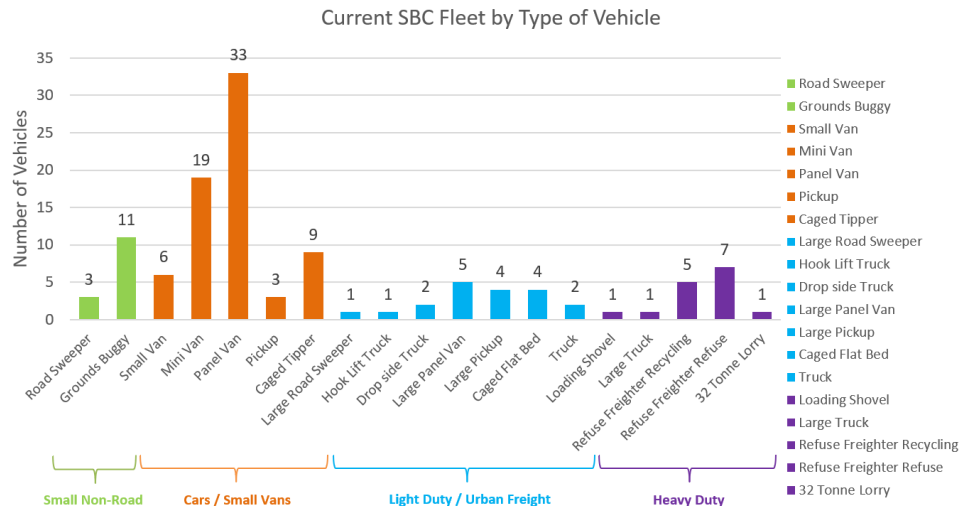
**Pathway 1 – Decarbonising fuel and fleet: highlights**

- 3.50 The transport sector accounts for about 28% of GHG emissions across Stevenage. The transport sector is the UK’s largest GHG emitter, and its emissions have increased after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3.51 As part of Stevenage’s target to be net zero by 2030, SBC has set a target for decarbonising its fleet before 2030. SBC’s fleet accounted for approximately 23% of total Scope 1 and 2 emissions of SBC based on the 2018 emissions baseline.
- 3.52 Scope 1 covers emissions from sources that an organisation owns or controls directly, for example from burning fuel in our fleet of vehicles or gas for heating our buildings. Scope 2, in turn, are emissions that an organisation causes indirectly and come from where the energy it purchases and uses is produced, typically the emissions produced from electricity generation. On the other hand, Scope 3 emissions encompasses emissions that are not produced by the organisation itself and are not the result of activities from assets owned or controlled by them, but by those that it is indirectly responsible for up and down its value chain. A summary on emissions scopes is shown below.

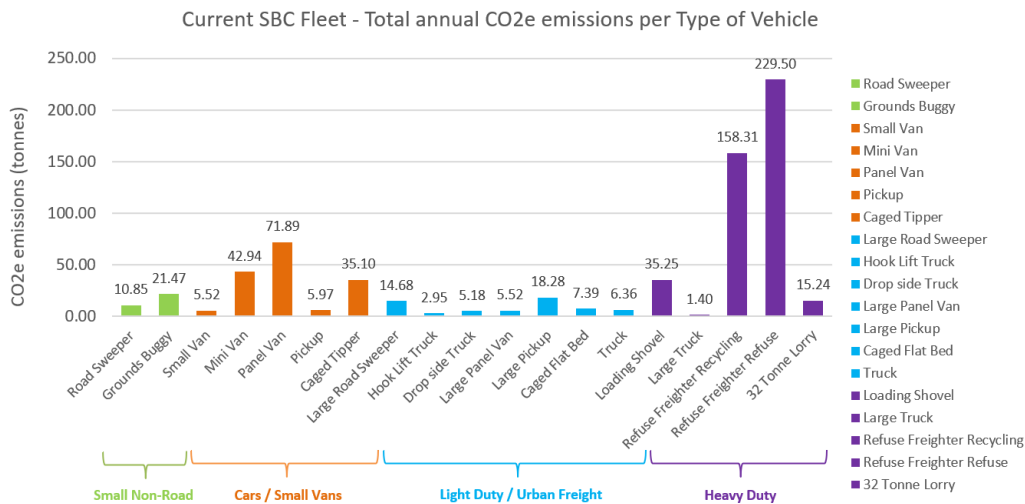


Source: GHG Protocol, Corporate Value Chain (Scope 3) Accounting and Reporting Standard

3.53 Currently, SBC operates a mixed fleet including around 104 road vehicles and more than one hundred non-road machinery and plants. The current SBC owned fleet composition by type of vehicle is shown below.



3.54 Around 63% of the emissions of SBC’s owned fleet come from heavy-duty vehicles, primarily refuse collection. The detail of the total annual tonnes of CO<sub>2e</sub> emissions per type of vehicle is presented in the next figure.



3.55 Decarbonising SBC transport-related emissions includes reducing carbon emissions across our own fleet, the grey fleet SBC uses for business travel, and the modes of commuting of our workforce. Decarbonising SBC fuel utilisation also involves making a transition in non-road machinery and plants. SBC have introduced a new electric van, and our seven refuse vehicles now have solar panels on their roofs. The solar panels are the Trailer Refuse 480w model. These are designed to supply power to the onboard electrical systems which means that the alternator is not required as much. Not using the alternator saves 10-15 brake HP from the engine which in turn saves fuel. It is estimated that over the course of a year each lorries solar panels will save up to 1,100 litres of diesel fuel, reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and saving money. The Council will target small fleet first where the technology is more available and look to fuel changes until heavy goods vehicle technology is there.

3.56 It is hoped that SBC, leading by example and decarbonising its fleet and reducing its fossil fuel consumption, will inspire and encourage others to do



the same across Stevenage whilst also identifying some synergies to support that transition, especially in developing infrastructure, as shown below.



3.57 Actions to decarbonise transport include avoiding or reducing the need for travel, shifting to more environmentally friendly modes of transport, switching to clean fuels, and upgrading the technology of the fleet with Zero Emissions Vehicles (ZEVs). These measures will require infrastructure and skills development.



3.58 Four scenarios have been modelled to analyse decarbonisation pathways for SBC-owned fleet, ranging from optimistic scenarios where all vehicles are replaced with ZEVs when they are due to be replaced, to scenarios where diesel is kept as the main fuel for vehicles until 2030.

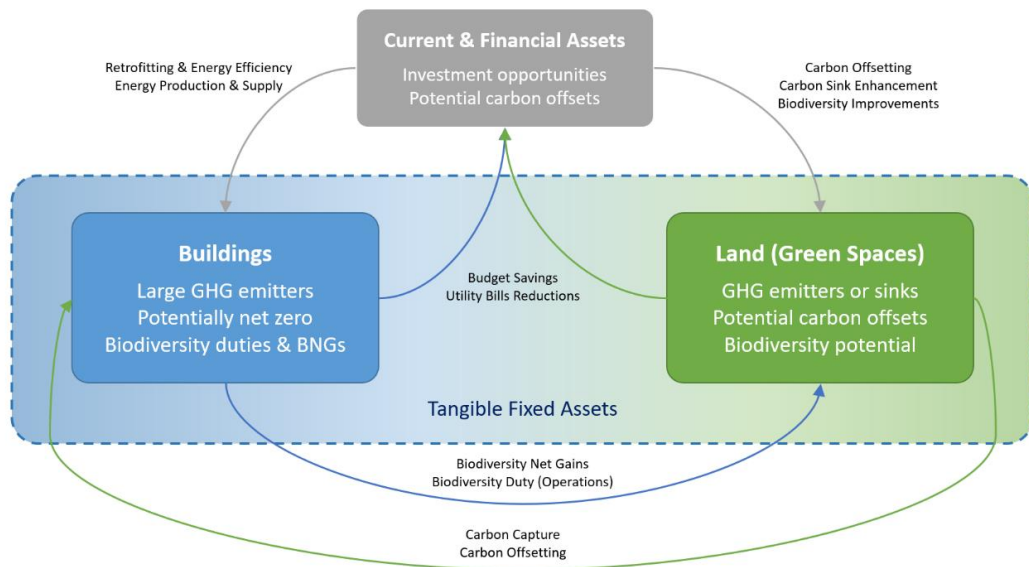
3.59 A proposed pathway includes the possibility to switch from diesel to HVO (Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil), a biowaste-based fuel, as soon as possible

and using Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs) as a replacement for cars and small vans (since 2025) and light-duty (since 2027). For heavy-duty vehicles, the switch to HVO can also be considered, along with ZEVs for fleet renewal since 2027, considering electric and hydrogen alternatives depending on the technology readiness.

- 3.60 A further set of actions has been designed for different categories within the fuel and fleet decarbonisation challenge. For the SBC-owned fleet, the switch to HVO has been analysed and suggested, and analyses of ZEV/Ultra Low Emissions Vehicles (ULEV) alternatives are planned to be conducted on a regular basis. For the grey fleet, the Council is currently working on a characterisation of driving patterns is identified as necessary before further decarbonisation measures and incentives are proposed. For workforce commuting, the Council is conducting an updated staff travel & work survey during 2023, the first one after the pandemic, as an initial step to estimate our Scope 3 emissions related to staff commuting and to upgrade our current Workplace Travel Plan.
- 3.61 Other transport-related measures for decarbonisation include the promotion of an EV-car club pool scheme available since 2023 for our staff business travel requirements, and the planning of a borough-wide hire to cycle scheme across Stevenage, which is expected to be operating by 2024, whose infrastructure related improvements could also have important synergies with business travel and commuting for SBC.

**Pathway 2 – Decarbonising assets and buildings: highlights**

- 3.62 Pathway 2 refers to SBC buildings emissions reductions, SBC land (green spaces) carbon capture, and financial assets support to decarbonisation actions, as shown below. To meet net zero virtually all heat in buildings needs to be decarbonised.



- 3.63 Stevenage Climate Change Strategy, Stevenage Local Plan and SPDs have incorporated renewable generation, energy efficiency criteria and principles. Our Local Plan has incorporated principles of sustainable development and

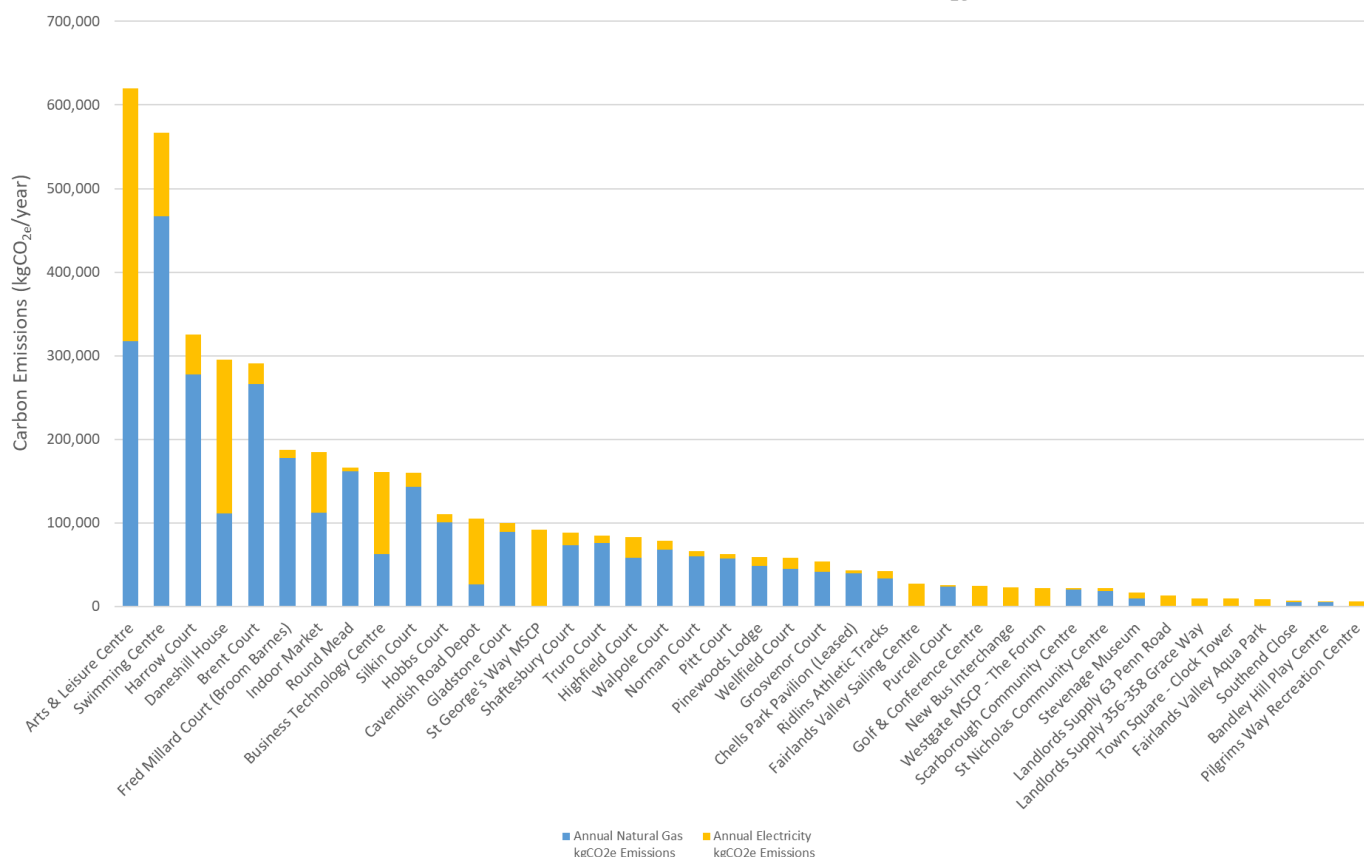
climate change impact reduction, aiming to ensure that all new developments are energy efficient. Planning permission is then granted where proposals demonstrate how they make high-quality buildings and spaces and how they are proactive about buildings energy performance (e.g., by including low carbon local energy generation and energy efficiency measures, where practicable). The Council encourages any development to improve upon the fabric of existing buildings, and to improve the energy efficiency of the building stock. Developments should also take advantage of natural light and heat from the Sun to minimise the need for additional energy. Stevenage Local Plan mentions the options of using PV panels, micro wind generators, and Ground Sourced Heat Pumps. Furthermore, the Council has adopted the Stevenage Design Guide SPD (January 2023) that provide guidance on matters introduced or strengthened by the SBLP, including encouraging developers to build and design energy efficient buildings, and carbon neutral specifications.

- 3.64 Decarbonising the Council buildings could help realise positive synergies with broader Stevenage decarbonisation targets, again through leading by example, but also directly contributing to the decarbonisation of the public sector, residential sector, and commercial sector across the town. These interactions are shown below.



- 3.65 In 2022, the Council moved to a zero-carbon tariff for electricity, allowing us to avoid about 1,578 tCO<sub>2e</sub>/year from electricity supply.
- 3.66 Reducing and phasing out natural gas use at SBC sites (about 3,002 tCO<sub>2</sub>/year) is the main remaining challenge for SBC buildings decarbonisation.
- 3.67 All new developments led by SBC (e.g., new civic hub) should consider efficient energy design, zero carbon heat and power, and the whole-life carbon of projects, including embodied carbon, aiming to be net zero.
- 3.68 The top 40 SBC sites with highest emissions related to energy consumption represent 94.4% of the total SBC buildings' emissions. Decarbonisation projects should prioritise these sites.

Top 40 Highest Carbon Emissions SBC Properties (kgCO<sub>2e</sub>/year)



- 3.69 Some actions already taken in this regard include the upgrade programmes of our Multi Storey Car Parks. St George's MSCP has LED lighting and motion sensors installed to reduce the electricity consumption. The Council has also got experience by installing and operating a PV system on the Railway North MSCP, and it is currently analysing further solar installations on its car parks.
- 3.70 Officers are also currently monitoring the electricity demand profile of 11 SBC sites, through a digital meter explorer created by Grid Edge since May 2023, as a first step to smart energy savings.
- 3.71 Moreover, officers have carried out energy audits at three of SBC's main buildings: Daneshill House, Cavendish Road Depot and the Indoor Market, identifying a set of actions that can be taken to reduce their energy consumption and support further decarbonisation. The details of the actions recommended can be seen in the Pathway 2 report included as an appendix (Table 5).
- 3.72 Based on the results of these energy audits and the new emissions baseline, a subset of SBC sites is proposed for funding applications such as the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) (e.g., Cavendish Road Depot, Indoor Market, Business & Technology Centre). Local authorities must contribute PSDS funding with a minimum of 12% of total project costs. Although this is primarily a gas heating system replacement scheme, it also includes a whole building approach, combining energy efficiency with low carbon heating.

- 3.73 The Council is currently working with the new leisure management contractor, Everyone Active, the contract for which included a set of sustainability-related actions to support the energy reduction and decarbonisation of our leisure facilities. Since they took over these facilities in April 2023, they have conducted works related to replacement of lighting, Building Management Systems (BMS) upgrades and reconfigurations, and insulation enhancement actions.
- 3.74 In terms of green spaces, to implement a bottom-up process to estimate carbon storage and sequestration on SBC green spaces has been proposed.
- 3.75 A set of principles to be included in considering SBC financial investments is being defined. These principles include an ESG positive screening approach, the promotion of carbon “insetting” to finance projects along SBC’s own value chain and the exploration of energy-related activities such as local generation.
- 3.76 To support a study to comprehensively analyse local energy generation opportunities across SBC sites, evaluate potential rent-a-rooftop schemes for SBC solar generation, and create a framework for local offsetting is suggested.
- 3.77 As a major housing provider, the Council has been keen to drive the decarbonisation of its own housing stock of almost 8,000 council homes. SBC has pledged that all our social homes will achieve an EPC rating of C by 2030.
- 3.78 The Council has been successful in obtaining grants for decarbonisation projects and actions across its housing stock. From March 2021 to May 2022, the Local Authority Delivery Scheme 1B (LAD1B) was delivered, targeting properties in an EPC band D or below. 150 properties were included in this programme involving the installation of solar panels at 123 properties, loft insulation at 9 properties and cavity wall insulation at 45 properties. The delivery of these measures increased the EPC score of all these properties to an EPC C or above. It is also estimated to have saved approximately 142.6 tCO<sub>2</sub> a year. The Council is preparing a bid to the future rounds of this scheme to further drive this work and deliver to further eligible properties. This will be factored into the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Planning process to consider future match-funding requirements from the HRA.
- 3.79 The Council has recently secured additional funding from the UK Government Social Housing Decarbonisation Funding Wave 1 and Wave 2.2. The SHDF is a £3.8bn Government commitment over a 10-year period to improve the energy performance of socially rented homes. The aim is to get social homes to an EPC rating of C. At present Stevenage have approximately 40% of their housing stock with EPCs of D or lower meaning the funding as well as being of great benefit to the Stevenage residents providing energy savings with fuel costs soaring and warmer properties and helping to try to reduce fuel poverty, it will also reduce carbon emissions and help towards Stevenage achieving net zero by 2030.
- 3.80 SHDF Wave 1 involved £1.8m plus SBC match funding of £918,273 for the project to improve the energy efficiency of a further 399 homes. Its



implementation has retrofitted 209 SBC social homes to an EPC Band C or B by using a fabric first approach. Energy efficiency measures included loft insulation, ventilation, and low energy lighting at all the homes, 95 cavity wall insulations, and 105 solar PV panel installations. SHDF Wave 1 upgrades sought to ensure energy usage in tenant's homes is more efficient, reducing the cost of tenants heating bills and lowering carbon emissions.

- 3.81 SHDF Wave 2.1 secured a total grant funding of £2.62 million. It will be used to improve 239 homes to an EPC Band C or B, by taking the fabric first approach, as a criterion laid out by the funding body, and targeting properties that are the least energy efficient. SHDF Wave 2.1 measures will also include external wall insulation, cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, energy efficient lighting, solar PV, and associated ventilation. SHDF Wave 1 included houses only whereas Wave 2 will include houses and some of SBC's flat blocks. As part of SHDF Wave 2.1, environmental monitors will be installed to some homes to monitor damp and condensation risks, energy usage, air quality, cold home risk and heat loss risk.
- 3.82 Additionally, currently, a review is taking place in some of the high-rise blocks of SBC's housing stock, and this will include analyses of energy consumption and performance at the block, and exploration of best ways to improve this.
- 3.83 An Intelligent Energy System has also been implemented to monitor our housing stock. Officers will shortly explore options to implement a similar system to all SBC properties to track energy demand reductions and decarbonisation progress.

### **Pathway 3 – People and Processes: highlights**

- 3.84 A third decarbonisation pathway is under development at SBC, covering emissions related to people and processes across our operations and services.
- 3.85 Water utilisation monitoring at different SBC sites has started to be gathered, in order to include the carbon footprint of water supply in the baseline of SBC GHG emissions. Additionally, water utilisation in the context of climate change adaptation is planned to be assessed.
- 3.86 Climate and transformation teams are also working in new ways of working strategies, primarily in preparation for SBC staff to move to the new civic hub in due course. This assessment would include new ways of using the offices and providing Council services, digitisation of activities, and the associated behavioural change needed from internal and external stakeholders, aiming to introduce further related carbon reductions.
- 3.87 The pathway also covers the need to develop strategies for becoming a less resources intensive organisation, for example, by promoting the switch to cashless and paperless processes and services.
- 3.88 A trial to introduce an Impact Assessment Tool integrated into the decision making for all SBC projects (starting with a subset of prioritised projects) is being developed.
- 3.89 A new Staff Commuting and Mode of Work survey is being developed and applied during 2023. This is the first survey conducted in this regard after the pandemic, aiming to gather proper information to estimate Scope 3

emissions related to staff commuting and business travel and to update our Workplace Travel Plan. Additionally, further analyses have been started to assess the grey fleet and business travel related low-carbon incentives.

- 3.90 In terms of waste collection services, analysis has been conducted on the commercial waste collection proposing actions to assess the efficiency of the service, the related logistics and efficiency, and the search of potential improvements to reduce its carbon footprint while enhancing the competitiveness of the service provided.
- 3.91 Finally, initial analysis to develop Sustainable Procurement actions across SBC have been outlined, particularly in its relationship with Social Value considerations. As mentioned earlier in this report a Meet the Buyer event in this regard has been organised by SBC as an initial attempt to understand the sustainable needs of big buyers across the town and to know the potential sustainable services that can be provided by local suppliers.

### **Levels 7- 9: Local Engagement**

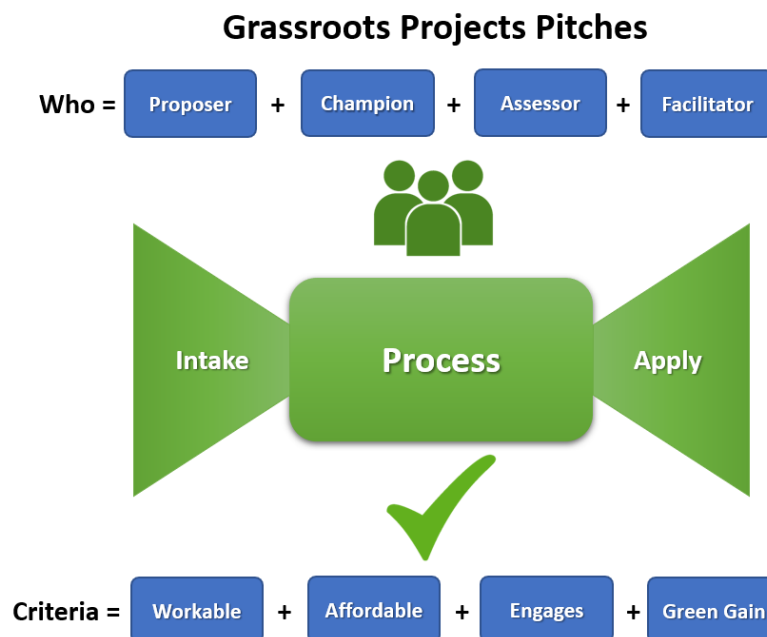
- 3.92 As the Council has refreshed its approach to the Climate Strategy and Action Plan, a renewed focus on neighbour and local level changes has been made.
- 3.93 To inform the strategy and action plan, extensive consultation has taken place. An open consultation in 2019/2020 achieved wide and broad engagement across the town, with 1,600 responses helping shape the strategy. Key priorities identified by residents included making a change to their method of travel and eating habits.
- 3.94 Further work on engaging with young people through the Green Schools network is being explored, alongside work with North Herts College. Youth Mayor and Youth Council will also work with the Council to ensure the Borough's younger voices are heard and empowered into action.
- 3.95 The Environment and Economy Select Committee have committed to reviewing the delivery of the climate strategy and action plan over a two-year period. Through this Committee, technical work has been undertaken with the University of Hertfordshire along with extensive discussions with stakeholder groups.
- 3.96 There is a cross-party member led group within the HCCSP, Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership, Hertfordshire Waste Partnership, which Cllr Speller will attend and contribute towards.
- 3.97 Over the last two years, a significant amount of preparation work has been undertaken to engage residents and businesses, work with partners and focus on deliverable actions that can achieve the goals of the Stevenage Borough Council Climate Strategy. The Council is working closely with partners through Stevenage Together, to share experiences on climate change, speak with a single voice to government and support its residents and customers to reduce their emissions.
- 3.98 The webpage will be regularly updated to inform residents about the work being undertaken and to seek their views. Currently it is more focused on

sharing information and providing education, but it will be expanded to including more interactive features and further detail updates on key projects.

- 3.99 The Council is developing a new reporting platform for internal and external use with a company specialising in climate change reporting. The system is being tested at the moment and hope to have a live version ready in the new year. It is designed to be user friendly and easier for the public to see how SBC is performing in its climate change ambitions.
- 3.100 Furthermore, for the first time, the Council took part in Stevenage Day in June 2023 with a specially dedicated stand about climate change, aiming to create awareness and to engage residents into climate action.

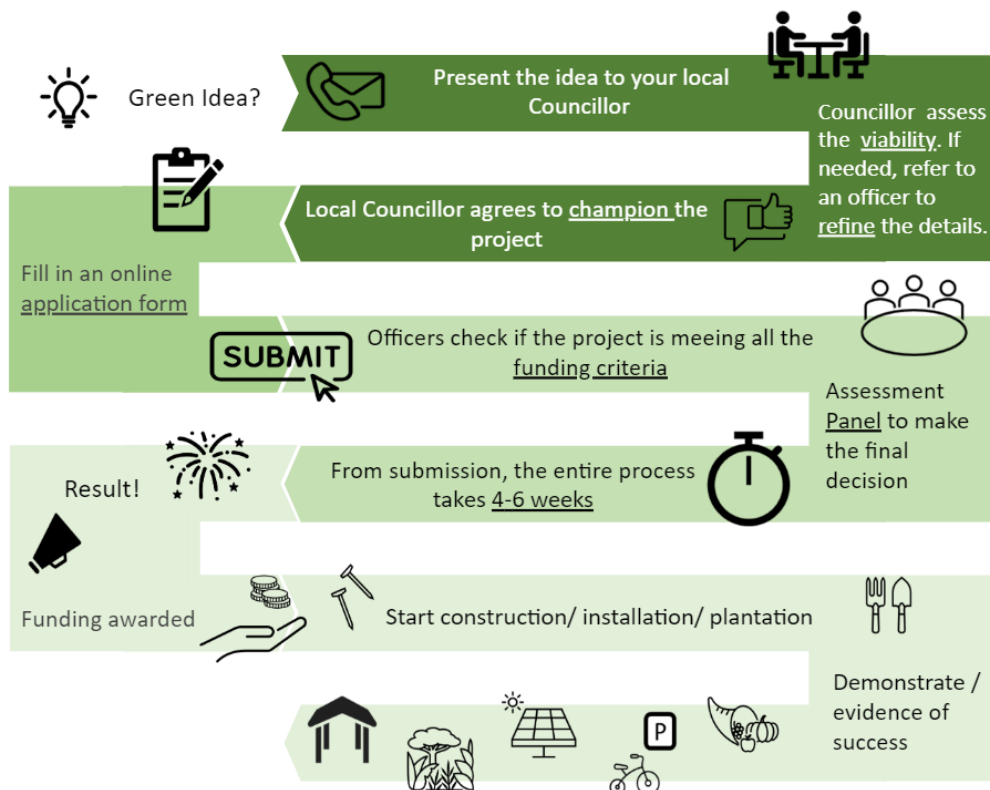
### Neighbourhood and street level working

- 3.101 One of the new approaches which was driven by the Portfolio Holder is that ideas from local people for greening their street or local area, can be submitted via our website, and with officer support, then taken to the Climate Change Progress Group (CCPG) for a 'dragon's den' style consideration.
- 3.102 A framework has been considered for grassroots projects pitches as shown below.



- 3.103 Money from local Community Infrastructure (CIL) and other funding streams could be used. Projects which had more community ownership, support, and potentially reduced costs for SBC while green a local street would be supported. £7,500 per ward per year is available for these CIL climate change improvements, through the Dragon's Den (Climate Change Community Fund). This will be alongside Member's access to their own Local Community Budgets. This will provide some opportunities for investing in projects that support climate change ambitions.
- 3.104 The process for the Dragon's Den is graphically outlined below.





- 3.105 In September 2023, the Coventry Close community project, led by Deborah Pullen from Waste Not Want Not and championed by Councillor Sandra Barr, was approved by the Climate Change Progress Group under the Dragon's Den scheme. The project aims to create a community garden for residents in the adjacent houses to socialise, create a gardening group, and improve local environmental factors such as air quality and biodiversity. The current 16x14m garden will be transformed to include 13 fruiting and flowering bushes, clustered perennials, and spring-flowering bulbs to provide a more diverse habitat for birds and insects, especially pollinators. Additionally, raised beds for vegetable planting and wooden benches built locally from donated wood will foster improved community relations, while the addition of compost, soil conditioner and wood chip will improve soil health. The project is expected to take a month for initial completion, with additional planting in spring of 2024. The species were chosen based on easy maintenance and with future climate change taken into consideration.
- 3.106 Working with the Portfolio Holder for Co-operative Council and Neighbourhoods, the Council is committed to securing Members and officer buy in with much work undertaken in this regard over the last few months, the next stage is listening and responding to our residents. The first Dragon's Den schemes are highlighted below.

Project Name	Ward	Councillor	Community Member	Approval Status	Project Status	Funding Amount	Output/Expected Output
Repair Café	Bedwell	Lyn M-Hall	Terry	Approved	Operational	£ 400.00	A space where members of the community can go to repair their broken items. Avoids items going to landfill and promotes a more sustainable mindset within the community.
Baddley Close Garden Patch	Shephall	Rob Broom	Tracey Dorkin	Approved	On hold	£ 1,000.00	Aim to create two sensory gardens and one vegetable patch. Funding will be spent on fencing, water-butt construction, plants and compost. Cost reduction of £200 for the council- based on twice a year mowing of the central grass area. Residents will plant own fruit and vegetables, re-use water, and improve local biodiversity with 'better soil mix'.
Leys Primary School Garden	St Nicholas	Sandra Barr	Alison Barr	Approved	Waiting for payments	£ 1,390.00	School garden that will enable the running of gardening clubs for small groups of children. Wormery used for food waste and compost bins for leaf/garden waste. Funding for shed, wheelbarrows, compost bins, worms, compost caddies, water butt, wellies and plants/watering system from WNVN.
Coventry Close Community Garden	St Nicholas	Sandra Barr	Deborah Pullen	Approved	Waiting for payments	£ 600.00	Community garden for residents in the adjacent houses to socialise, create a gardening group, and improve local environmental factors such as air quality and biodiversity. 13 fruiting and flowering bushes, clustered perennials and spring-flowering bulbs to provide a more diverse habitat. Raised beds for vegetable planting and wooden benches built locally from donated wood. Addition of compost, soil conditioner and wood chip to improve soil health.
Peartree Shops Water Butt	Shephall	Rob Broom	Robert Clark	Waiting for finalised info/form	Application pending	TBC	Leaking pipe from flats in Peartree shops - Robert has asked for a waterbutt that will conserve the rainwater and be used to water the flowerbeds in front of the shops.
Peartree Shops Flowerbed Regen	Shephall	Rob Broom	Robert Clark & Sarah Mead	Waiting for finalised info/form	Application pending	TBC	Visually improved flowerbed area that can provide colour all year round. Better soil health and encouragement of pollinators.
Bedwell GNP	Bedwell	Conor McGrath	David Bundy	Waiting for finalised info/form	Application pending	TBC	To explore the creation of a Green Neighbourhood Plan for Bedwell and outline key asks/projects that CCCF can aid.
<b>Total</b>						<b>£ 3,390.00</b>	

- 3.107 The approach is that through a series of street meets and walkabout, ideas from local people about what might improve their 'pocket neighbourhood' can be heard, and officers and local ward councillors working together can see how these re-greening improvements can be made. Much of this way of working will be embraced corporately as part of our Co-operative Neighbourhoods approach. Bedwell is currently the first area to trial this approach.
- 3.108 Topic Reference Panels have been set up for sustainable travel (ATLEE) to hear from both those with an interest in Climate Change and those without it, about what climate change means to them and what the Council can do. The first group has been running for 6 months, ATLEE. In co-operation with interested technical groups relating to sustainable transport the Council has developed an effective working group across the sector to listen to concerns, develop joint initiatives and support our collective ambitions for sustainable transport.
- 3.109 The Climate Change Progress Group (CCGP) group was established in early 2023, led by the Climate Change Programme Lead, to report quarterly clearly on SBCs performance in meeting its climate change commitments. This high-level group of officers and Portfolio Holders will keep a track on performance and highlight achievements and areas which require addition support and resources.

## **4 IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial Implications**

- 4.1 The costs associated with producing and consulting on the climate change strategy have been met from the agreed departmental budget. A number of projects referenced within this report have secured third party funding from government and other sources, such as S106 agreements, to be able to pilot initiatives, or to improve sustainable travel assets. Local CIL funding may also be available to support improvements to local infrastructure that reduce the carbon emission in an area such as new tree, better lighting and footway improvements.
- 4.2 SBC funding for permanent Head of Climate Action, the recruit taken place and the officer is now in the role.
- 4.3 It is recognised that a move to net zero and sustainable travel could mean reduced income, for example related to car parking income, which is used to fund other services, and will need to be continually reviewed through the Medium Term Financial Plan process. There are likely to be significant reductions in income to the Council linked to changes in the way people commute and use the Council's car parks. This will need to be carefully managed to ensure the services and provisions for sustainable transport the income funds can continue. As the report identifies, for councils to meet net zero, by 2024, significant funding will be required from central government and/or third parties to fund the cost of large scale projects, such as implementation of Electric Vehicle charging networks, retrofit of council housing stock and commercial and operational buildings.
- 4.4 As the Council works on options and future projects to achieve the ambition of being a net zero carbon Council and town by 2030, Officers will need to bring forward a number of business cases. If the government does not step in to support the local government sector and the Council is required to provide the investment then a significant reprioritisation of other projects and activities would be required to progress highly complex projects to absorb increased revenue and capital costs.

### **Legal Implications**

- 4.5 There are no direct legal implications associated with adopting the Climate Change Strategy, however it is likely the Government will begin introducing stricter targets with legal implications for those councils that are not meeting carbon reductions.

### **Risk Implications**

- 4.6 The greatest risks associated with this work are failing to secure sufficient support from residents, businesses and government to protect us all from the effect of climate change.

### **Policy Implications**

- 4.7 The Annual Update on Climate Change supports the Council's own Climate Change Strategy and wider corporate ambitions for a low carbon future.

### **Climate Change Implications**

- 4.8 This report highlights the risks, challenges and opportunities that the Council has to address, not only carbon emissions but its wider climate change aspirations.

### **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 4.9 Climate change affects those in most need both in the UK and around the world. Those in deprivation, hunger or unwell are both most affected by climate change and least able to address it. Therefore, the Council is duty bound as one of those in the world that are more able to act, to act now.

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None.

## **Appendix 1: Climate Change Strategy Themes**

### **Theme visions**

- 4.10 The priorities above help deliver priority areas identified within the 2019 Climate Strategy and Action Plan, which is based on 8 priority areas. A summary of the vision for each theme (from 2019) is set out below.

#### **People**

- 4.11 The only way we can achieve the goal of carbon zero by 2030 is if everyone plays their part. Through educating, engaging, supporting, listening and communicating with our residents from all background, positions, ages and interests can we collectively make the required changes to our behaviour.

#### **Biodiversity**

- 4.12 Ensuring our biodiversity is improved as part of the carbon reduction measures will ensure we have a holistic approach to the wider sustainability impacts we as humans are having on our local ecology. Using nature's natural way of addressing the human impact of climate change is the most effective method of taking action. Ensuring that one area of improvements does not undermine the other is vital.

#### **Transport**

- 4.13 Making up nearly a third of our emissions Transport is a key area for us to address, and one that behaviourally we as residents, employers, employees or visitors make every day. Big changes and support from the Transport Authority can have huge transformational impacts not only on our carbon outputs, but also health and employment opportunities.

#### **Energy & Water**

- 4.14 The source and use of energy has the opportunities to make significant changes in our carbon emissions relatively quickly, particularly while we are still trying to change behaviours. It is expected that the general electrical grid will be fully re-carbonised by 2050 which is too late for our targets, so encouraging all energy users to not only consider where they source their energy from but how much is used, is one of the first major actions. As our temperature increases, our water usage increases and availability decreases. Hertfordshire is already one of the driest regions in the UK yet we use twice as much water as people in places like Manchester. Actions to address leakage and chalk stream sourcing need to also be considered.

#### **Businesses & Homes**

- 4.15 Industrial and residential users make up nearly two-thirds of carbon emissions, investment in de-carbonising industrial processes, and home heating / energy use are key areas to support and educated our businesses and residential to make the changes. Government financial support will be required too.

### **Construction & Regeneration**

- 4.16 As a leader in building new home sand regenerating the town centre the Council will have significant powers and opportunities to build better buildings and places, which are designed in sustainable ways, in sustainable locations.

### **Waste & Recycling**

- 4.17 Reducing, reusing, then recycling need to be at the heart of what we do as a Council collecting and processing waste but also in educating our residents and businesses.

**Meeting** Executive  
**Portfolio Area** Housing and Housing Development  
**Date** 12 October 2023



## HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY

### KEY DECISION

#### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report outlines the key changes to the Housing Allocation Policy.
- 1.2 The aim of the Allocation Policy, required under section 167 of the 1996 Housing Act, is:
- to meet the legal requirements placed on the council to give appropriate priority to applicants who fall under the Housing Act reasonable preference groups,
  - address housing need in the allocation of social housing,
  - clearly outline the process for applying for social housing within Stevenage,
  - make best use of housing stock,
  - maximise access and choice for applicants wherever practicable
  - and to meet the wider objectives of the council's housing and homelessness strategies.
- 1.3 Demand for social housing in Stevenage is high and continues to increase. An average of 784 applicants have joined our Housing Register each year over the last two years with an average of 164 applicants each year joining the transfer register for tenants. The proposed changes drive further

transparency with the housing allocations process and continue to ensure the focus on helping those with the greatest need.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the new Housing Allocation Policy, as attached at Appendix A, be approved and adopted.
- 2.2 That the policy be adopted on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024, subject to confirmation of system build requirements and all applicants and relevant stakeholders have been updated.
- 2.3 That an easy read reference guide is created to accompany the policy.
- 2.4 That the impact of the proposed changes is monitored, and the policy is reviewed 12 months after implementation.

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 To highlight the council's continued significant investment (£24.6 million) in its social housing stock, in June 2023/24 the Future Town Future Council (FTFC) strategic priority of 'More Social and Affordable Homes' was amended to 'More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Homes'. This change in focus not only represents the council's investment in new and existing social housing, but also pre-empts the new requirements of Registered Providers as set out in the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.
- 3.2 As the cost-of-living crisis deepens nationally, Stevenage residents are struggling with the cost of maintaining a home. In August 2023, interest rates hit a 15 year high, forcing more people into the private rented sector. For those on benefits, the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) set by central government hasn't increased since 2020, whilst rents have continued to rise.
- 3.3 The average rental cost of a three-bedroom property in Stevenage is £1600 per month whilst the LHA rate is £1047.10 per month, leaving a shortfall of £552.90 for tenants to attempt to pay or face eviction. When housing costs are high and there is not enough affordable housing, many more households become overcrowded or are eventually faced with homelessness.
- 3.4 Demand for social housing by far outweighs supply within Stevenage as is seen across most local authority areas. As housing demand increases across a range of client groups such as those who are homeless and those with medical requirements, many of the current applicants on the council's Housing Register are unlikely to ever secure social housing.
- 3.5 The council's current Housing Register (including the Transfer Register and Housing Association Transfer Register) has approximately 4000 applicants registered. An average of 784 applicants have joined our Housing Register each year over the last two years with an average of 164 applicants each year joining the Transfer Register. In 2021/22 the council let 196 properties and 179 in 2022/23.



- 3.6 Local authorities have a duty to regularly review their allocation policies to ensure social housing focus is assisting those in most housing need including those overcrowded.
- 3.7 The 1996 Housing Act (as amended by the 2002 Homelessness Act) requires local authorities to make all allocations and nominations in accordance with an Allocation Policy.
- 3.8 Councils are required to give Reasonable Preference in their allocation policies to people with high levels of assessed housing need, this includes those who:
- are owed certain homelessness duties
  - are occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing
  - need to move on medical or welfare grounds
  - need to move to avoid hardship to themselves or others.
- 3.9 Local authorities are also required to offer applicants the opportunity to have a choice about the housing accommodation to be allocated to them.
- 3.10 The council's existing policy was implemented in January 2015. The six key changes were to:
- strengthen the existing local connection criteria
  - exclude homeowners from the housing register
  - strengthen sanctions for those who behave antisocially or have housing related debts
  - move from a points system to a banding system of prioritising applications
  - create a separate transfer register for council tenants
  - introduce quotas across all bands.
- 3.11 Subsequent revisions of the policy took place in July 2015, January 2016 and March 2018, that included:
- applicants 55 and over being considered for first floor un-lifted sheltered accommodation
  - older persons who do not have a local connection to Stevenage being considered for low demand sheltered housing
  - the inclusion of homeowners in Stevenage eligible for sheltered accommodation only who sell their homes to the council in accordance with the Buy Back Policy
  - residents of the North Herts area of Great Ashby no longer being eligible
  - the local connection rule based on employment only being suspended
  - the addition of the five years in the last seven local connection criteria.

3.12 In response to specific requirements of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, the Executive agreed two policies in July 2023, with the aim to better manage the council’s housing stock and assist those most in need:

- The Under Occupation Policy - this supports tenants wishing to downsize to more suitable accommodation whilst freeing up larger properties for overcrowded families.
- The Local Lettings Policy for the allocation of Independent Living, Flexicare and Designated Older People Accommodation – this policy recognises Stevenage’s ageing population and will ensure that the council meets the needs of older people and complex cases requiring specific property types and support.

**4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS**

4.1 The new Allocations Policy as seen in Appendix A applies Reasonable Preference in line with the homelessness duties that were introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

4.2 The proposed changes to the Allocation Policy will also further strengthen the council’s ability to meet the Consumer Standards arising from the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.

4.3 To help frame the proposed policy, consultation on seven proposals took place for eight weeks beginning in October 2022. To allow for more face-to-face discussions, a further two weeks of consultation was carried out in December 2022.

4.4 Key groups across the community were consulted including Housing Register applicants from all bands, those not on the register, older people, single people, homeless, minorities and those with disabilities. Key stakeholder organisations were also consulted including housing associations, Hertfordshire County Council and Mental Health Services.

4.5 The council’s Community Select Committee was also consulted and provided feedback in March and September 2023 to help shape the policy. The Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development have also been consulted.

4.6 A detailed evaluation of the consultation responses with background information and demographic information can be seen in appendix B.

4.7 The table below shows the proposed changes to the policy and the reasons why:

<b>Change to Policy</b>	<b>Reason</b>
Applicants without a housing need would not be	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demand outstrips supply.</li> <li>• Those most in need would be allocated social housing.</li> </ul>

<p>able to join the Housing Register.</p> <p>A Housing need refers to those in reasonable preference groups including those who are owed certain homelessness duties, occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing, need to move on medical or welfare grounds and need to move to avoid hardship to themselves or others.</p> <p>Applicants' ineligible to join the register will include those adequately housed in the private rented sector and single people or couples with no housing need that are sharing a home with another household.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater transparency. Current applicants unlikely to secure housing will not be eligible to join the register.</li> <li>• Supported in consultation.</li> </ul>
<p>Reduce the number of Bands from 6 to 3.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fewer bands would be easier for applicants to understand.</li> <li>• Changing the banding is an opportunity to re-communicate about the housing register and manage expectations.</li> <li>• Supported in consultation.</li> </ul>
<p>Change the name of bands to 1 to 3.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing to band numbers would avoid applicants comparing to their previous bands and interpreting their position incorrectly.</li> <li>• Recommended by Community Select Committee.</li> </ul>
<p>Removal of applicants who have not submitted a bid in a year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Those not bidding for over a year, unless they have a good reason which will be verified, are unlikely to have a true housing need.</li> <li>• The Housing Register would be true reflection of those in housing need.</li> <li>• Supported in consultation.</li> </ul>
<p>Removal of quota that gives applicants across bands A to E a share of the homes available each year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Properties would be let to those most in need.</li> <li>• Supported in consultation.</li> </ul>

<p>Bedroom Standard altered - Same sex sharing a bedroom raised to 18 from 16.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demand outstrips supply.</li> <li>• The short supply of larger properties will be allocated to those with older household members and different sexes.</li> <li>• Only 56% support in consultation for removing any age limitation to sharing a bedroom meaning adults of the same sex would share.</li> <li>• Community Select Committee recommended some age restriction. Code of Guidance recommends 21 but this was felt to be too old to share a bedroom.</li> </ul>
<p>Removal of the policy line that allows families with two young children to secure three-bedroom properties.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To meet the immediate demand of overcrowded families.</li> <li>• Current policy inflates the housing need of those with young children and restricts those with genuine overcrowding to be successful in bidding.</li> <li>• To avoid those being subject to spare room subsidy.</li> <li>• Prevents the current practice of those mutually exchanging to another property and are therefore eligible for properties with one extra bedroom, being eligible to exchange into four-bedroom properties. This would ensure that larger households are more likely to exchange into any available four-bedroom properties.</li> </ul>
<p>Those applicants owed homeless duties to be included on the Housing Register.</p> <p>Discretion has been applied to the statutory homeless duties meaning that those owed a prevention or relief duty are required to meet the Allocations Policy eligibility criteria including local connection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required by Homeless Reduction Act 2017. All homeless duties to be given reasonable preference. The Council can apply discretion but cannot make a whole group owed a particular duty ineligible.</li> <li>• Staggered reasonable preference with highest priority to those owed main duty or those in relief duty who are likely to be owed main duty to relieve pressure on emergency and temporary accommodation.</li> <li>• The Allocation Policy eligibility criteria including local connection has not been applied to those owed the main housing duty as this would inhibit move on from temporary accommodation.</li> </ul>
<p>Priority banding to pregnant applicants or those with children who are sharing a home with family or friends and who meet the Allocation Policy eligibility criteria, are</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To reduce demand on temporary accommodation. The number of homeless cases as a result of family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate is currently on average 45% of all homeless presentations in Stevenage.</li> </ul>

<p>owed a homelessness prevention duty that has ended and have been allowed to stay at home for at least a year whilst they bid for social housing.</p> <p>Offers band 3 priority for 6 months which is then boosted to band 2.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed change may also lead to those losing their accommodation in the private rented sector staying with family and friends for at least a year rather than presenting immediately to the council as homeless.</li> </ul>
<p>Housing debt exclusion – those with rent arrears or other housing related debt of over £1000 will not be eligible to join the Housing Register or can qualify but not be entitled to be made an allocation of housing until the debt is resolved according to the criteria of the policy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide clarity for tenants and prospective tenants. The current policy refers to the number of weeks in arrears.</li> <li>• To provide an incentive to applicants to clear arrears and seek support.</li> </ul>
<p>Care leavers to be given the opportunity to bid on 1-bedroom properties and also band 1 priority.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care leavers are currently only permitted to bid on studio accommodation. Availability of this type of accommodation is very limited and results in care leavers waiting for extended periods to secure a home. The change will speed up their ability to move on when they are assessed as ready to live independently.</li> <li>• Makes best use of stock available.</li> </ul>

4.8 Local Registered Providers will continue to make nominations via the Housing Register and in doing so will meet the new Consumer Standards that require them to co-operate with local authorities' strategic housing functions and assist local authorities to fulfil their housing and homelessness duties.

4.9 A detailed implementation plan is being finalised and will start to be implemented once the Executive has approved the Allocations Policy, with the aim for the policy to be adopted by 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024. The Housing IT systems team will assess the required changes to the system and may require consultancy support before implementation. This will be scheduled into their work plan.

- 4.10 Officers will attend training to ensure that not only those officers managing the Allocations Policy, but all officers engaging with residents, will have a good understanding of the changes to the policy.
- 4.11 A straightforward guide to how residents can join the Housing Register will be developed and communicated through different channels. All current Housing Register applicants will be contacted individually to explain what the changes mean to them before implementation.
- 4.12 Continuous monitoring of the impact of the policy and feedback from all stakeholders will be taken into consideration from implementation to avoid any disproportionate effects on any groups. A revision of the policy will be carried out a year after implementation.

## **5 IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial Implications**

- 5.1 Implementation of the scheme will be carried out within existing resources. Any consultancy costs for systems changes which may arise will be included in the Housing Revenue Account budget setting process.

### **Legal Implications**

- 5.2 The 1996 Housing Act requires local authorities to make all allocations and nominations in accordance with an Allocation Policy. A summary of the Allocation Policy must be published and made available free of charge to any person who asks for a copy.
- 5.3 The Housing Act 1996 requires councils to give Reasonable Preference in their Allocation Policy to people with high levels of assessed housing need who are defined as:
- all homeless people as defined in Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (whether or not the applicant is owed a statutory homeless duty)
  - people who are owed a duty under Sections 189B, 190 (2), 193 (2), or 195 of the Housing Act 1996 (or under Sections 65 (2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any Housing Authority under Section 192 (3)
  - people occupying insanitary, overcrowded or otherwise unsatisfactory housing
  - people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including grounds relating to a disability)
  - people who need to move to a particular locality within the area to avoid hardship to themselves or others.
- 5.4 The scheme must be framed so as to give additional preference to a person with urgent housing need, which means an applicant who falls within one or more of the categories above and/or who has certain connections with armed

forces. Additional preference may also be given to other persons in urgent housing need who fall within the above categories.

5.5 When allocating properties, a council's allocation policy can take account of:

- the financial resources available to a person to meet their housing costs;
- any behaviour of a person (or of a member of their household) which affects their suitability to be a tenant;
- any local connection which exists between a person and the authority's district.

5.6 The Housing Act 1996 also requires councils to state within their allocation policies, their position on offering applicants a choice of housing accommodation or offering them the opportunity to express a preference about the housing accommodation to be allocated to them. The council's policy on choice is detailed in appendix B, section 4 of the Policy.

### **Risk Implications**

5.7 Current guidance requires the council to review the Housing Allocation Policy on a regular basis to ensure compliance with case law and to identify any mitigation required to offset legal challenges.

### **Policy Implications**

5.8 This report is wholly concerned with the policy for the allocation of the council's housing stock. The recommendations are made to ensure that the council has greater control in deciding who qualifies for an offer of social housing.

5.9 The proposed new Housing Allocation Policy will mean that allocations of social housing are prioritised to those in housing need who have a commitment to Stevenage and will help the Council to ensure the best use of the housing stock.

### **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

5.10 A comprehensive Equalities Impact Assessment of the Allocation Policy has been carried out and can be seen in Appendix C. A further assessment will be carried out in November 2023, when the implementation plan is finalised.

5.11 The proposed policy will have a positive impact on a number of groups with protected characteristics, including:

- those at socio-economic disadvantage such as those living in overcrowded accommodation and homeless applicants will have priority banding.
- only those with a housing need will be eligible to join the Housing Register leading to those with medical priority including those with a disability having a greater chance of securing a property.
- the insecurity of being pregnant and sharing accommodation with another household will be given greater consideration and for those

threatened with homelessness, priority will be awarded in some circumstances.

- Independent Living properties will be let by direct offer entirely outside of the bidding system, which will give older people more targeted support should they require it.
- the policy gives Gypsy or Traveller households consideration when applying the residency criteria where the applicant may not fully meet the five years in the last seven rule, if that period has been broken by travelling but the applicant has spent the majority of the time residing in Stevenage.

### **Information Technology Implications**

- 5.12 Changes to the NEC Housing Management system to include the necessary changes to the allocation module and may require consultancy.

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

BD1 Allocations Scheme 2014

BD2 Executive report Review of the Allocations Scheme

### **APPENDICES**

A Allocation Policy 2023

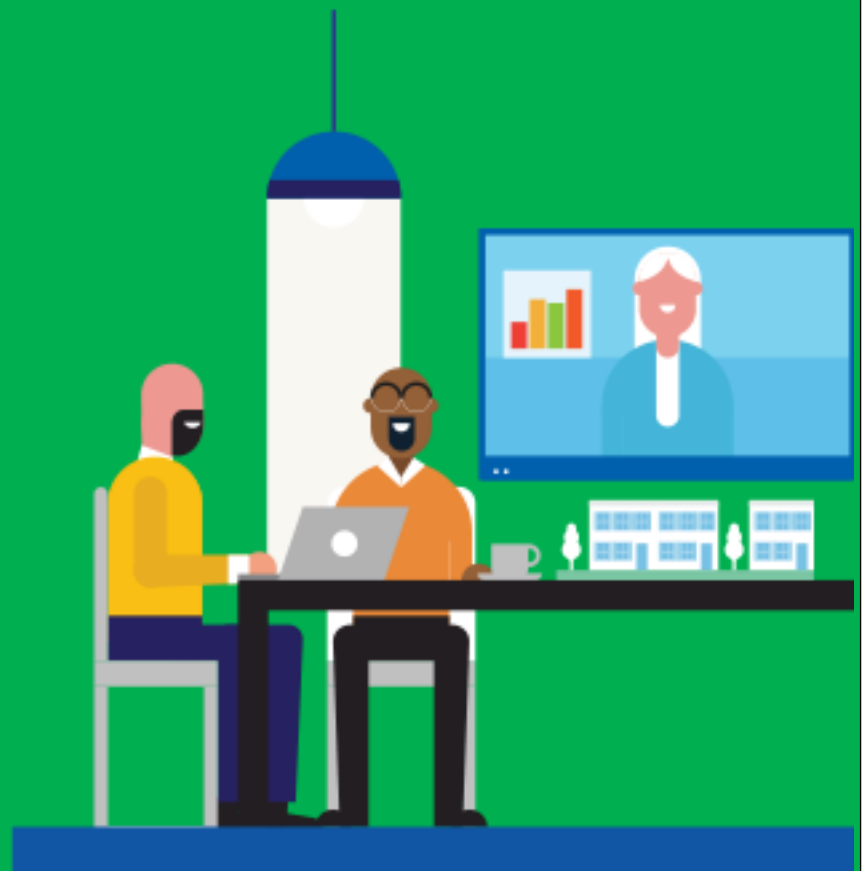
B Evaluation of responses with background information and demographic information from consultation on proposed changes to Allocation Policy

C Equality impact assessment



# Stevenage Borough Council Housing Allocation Policy

September 2023



# Stevenage Borough Council Housing Allocation Policy: September 2023

<b>Section 1: Introduction to the Housing Allocations Policy</b>	
Introduction	4
Legal context	4
Making changes to the Policy	5
The key objectives set for the Policy	7
<b>Section 2: Who can apply to join the Housing Register and how we will assess you</b>	
The eligibility persons from abroad qualification rules	8
The qualification rules adopted by the Council	8
Qualification rule 1: Residential Connection	9
Qualification rule 2: Housing Need	11
Qualification rule 3: Serious unacceptable behaviour	11
Qualification rule 4: Current or former social housing rent arrears	14
Qualification rule 5: Fraud or giving false information	17
Qualification rule 6: Homeownership or legal interest in home ownership	18
Qualification rule 7: Applying within 1 years of accepting a Council introductory tenancy or a Housing Association Starter tenancy	19
Qualification rule 8: Refusal of 2 offers in a 12-month period	19
Qualification rule 9: Failure to bid	19
Exceptional circumstances to qualification rules	19
<b>Section 3: Applying to join the Housing Register</b>	
How to apply	22
Verifying an application	22
Who can be included in the application?	23
Households with access to children/shared residency order or Child Arrangement Orders	25
Applications from Councillors, or Housing staff	25
Applications from Care Leavers	26
Move on from supported housing rules	26
Checks into any court cases or unspent criminal convictions	27
Assessing applications	27
The requirement to inform the Council of any change of circumstances	28
Cancelling applications	28
Reviewing the Register	29
Deliberate worsening of circumstances	29
<b>Section 4: General rules and conditions</b>	
Statement on choice	31
Penalty for refusing a set number of offers	32
When the Council may make a direct offer outside of the choice based letting system and, in exceptional circumstances, band and date order system	32
Offers of accommodation made to any applicant owed any statutory homelessness duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996	34

When an application may be suspended	35
Assessing banding for medical or disability needs	36
Need for an adapted property	37
Specialist accommodation for older persons	38
Role of the Housing Needs Panel	38
Statutory Successions	38
Discretionary Successions	39
Local Lettings Policies	39
Assessing overcrowding and bedroom size	40
Data Protection	42
Right to information	43
Equality, accessibility and monitoring	43
Complaints	43
Right to request a review	44
Monitoring and reviewing the policy	45
Quota for applicants owed a homeless duty	45
Contacting the Council	45
<b>Section 5: How an applicant's housing needs and circumstances will be assessed</b>	
The Banding System	46
Details for the 3 Bands 1-3 and the housing need criteria required to qualify for each	46
Advertising properties	57
The bidding and selection process	58
Offers of accommodation	59
Acceptance of an offer made under CBL or a direct offer	61
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1: Definition of a reasonable offer	62
Appendix 2: Assessing whether an applicant qualifies for Bands 1 or 2 on the basis of medical priority	65
Appendix 3: Right to move criteria	71
Appendix 4: How Local Lettings Policy will be applied and reviewed	73
Appendix 5: Definitions of supported housing schemes	75

# Stevenage Borough Council Housing Allocation Policy

September 2023

## 1.0: Introduction

This document is the revised Housing Allocation Policy for Stevenage Borough Council. It explains who may or may not join the council's housing register, how to apply for social housing by joining the housing register and how decisions are made about allocating homes. This document, and a summary document, are available on request from the council and can also be downloaded from the council's website [www.stevenage.gov.uk](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk).

The policy applies to both new applicants and existing council/social housing tenants who wish to transfer to another home and covers important issues such as:

- Who is eligible to apply for housing
- Circumstances when an applicant will not be eligible to join the Housing Register or will not qualify to do so.
- The process of applying for housing, including 'bidding'
- How housing needs are assessed
- How properties are allocated to different household sizes and circumstances
- How the Council will consider exercising discretion
- How offers of accommodation are made

## 1.1: Legal Context

Stevenage Borough Council's Allocation Policy sits within a legal framework that is summarised in this section.

The 1996 Housing Act (as amended by the 2002 Homelessness Act) requires local authorities to make all allocations and nominations in accordance with an Allocation Policy. A summary of the Allocation Policy must be published and made available free of charge to any person who asks for a copy. This document is available on the council's web site: <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/housing-register>

The Housing Act 1996, (as amended) requires councils to give Reasonable Preference in their Allocation Policy to people with high levels of assessed housing need who are defined as:

- all homeless people as defined in Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (whether or not the applicant is owed a statutory homeless duty)
- people who are owed a duty under Sections 189B, 190 (2), 193 (2), or 195 of the Housing Act 1996 (or under Sections 65 (2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any Housing Authority under Section 192 (3)
- people occupying insanitary, overcrowded or otherwise unsatisfactory housing
- people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds (including grounds relating to a disability)
- people who need to move to a particular locality within the area to avoid hardship to themselves or others

The Housing Act 1996 also requires councils to state within their Allocation Policy their position on offering applicants a choice of housing accommodation or offering them the opportunity to express a preference about the housing accommodation to be allocated to them. Our policy on choice is described in section 4 of this Policy.

In developing this policy, the Council has had regard to the law and regulatory requirements, including:

- a) The Housing Act 1996, Part 6 as amended by Localism Act 2011 (England).
- b) The Housing Act 1996, Part 7 as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- c) Allocation of Accommodation: Guidance for Local housing Authorities in England (2012, DCLG) “the Code”.
- d) Providing social housing for local people: Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England (DCLG, December 2013) “Supplementary Code”.
- e) Allocation of Housing (Procedure) Regulations 1997, SI 1997/483 Allocation of Housing (England) Regulations 2002, SI 2002/3264.
- f) Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006, SI 2006/1294 and all subsequent amendments.
- g) Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012, SI 2012/1869.
- h) Housing Act 1996 (Additional Preference for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012, SI 2012/2989.
- i) The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Right to Move) (England) Regulations 2015.
- j) ‘The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (SI 2019/861)’.
- k) Equality Act 2010.
- l) Data Protection Act 2018
- m) UK-GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) 2021.
- n) Care Act 2014.
- o) Human Rights Act 1998.
- p) Domestic Abuse Act 2021; and
- q) Children and Social Work Act 2017

In framing the Allocation Policy, regard has also been given to the Council’s current:

- Housing Strategy
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy
- Tenancy Strategy,
- Relevant caselaw.

All references to statutory materials are by way of summary and are not used as substitutes for the details within the original.

The Council will provide an electronic copy of this Policy to anyone who asks for one. Copies in alternative formats will be considered on an individual basis. A paper copy can be available on request.

Any provision in this Policy may be waived in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the lead officer responsible for the housing services. The reasons why a provision has been waived will be documented. An applicant can ask for discretion to be applied for exceptional circumstances in relation to how they have been treated under any part of this policy. The process for how the Council will consider a claim that discretion should be applied for exceptional circumstances is detailed in section 2 of the policy.

This is the revised Housing Allocation Policy for Stevenage Borough Council and will take effect on or after *insert date here when the Policy has been approved and an implementation date has been agreed*. The assessment of need and qualifying criteria set out in the Policy will be applied to all new and existing applicants from this date.

### **1.3: Making changes to the Policy**

The policy will be reviewed and revised as required in response to:

- Any national policy or legislative changes, or
- Policy changes instigated by the council, or
- To reflect the requirements of any leading and relevant new case law

Any significant changes to this Policy will be approved by a meeting of the council's Executive.

For minor changes to the Policy, or changes to the procedures that administer it, decisions will be delegated to the Portfolio Holder responsible for Housing.

Decisions on changing the operating procedures will be delegated to the lead officer for the Housing Service.

Formally, any major change to the Policy can only be made after a copy of the proposed amendments have been consulted on by sending this Policy to every Private Registered Provider operating in the Borough and giving them a reasonable period of time to comment on any proposed changes. This is a requirement under Section s166A (13) Housing Act 1996.

The council will take any steps as it considers reasonable within a reasonable period of time, to bring to the attention of applicants likely to be affected by:

- a) any alterations made to this Policy
- b) any subsequent alteration to this Policy that would affect the relative priority of a large number of applicants; or
- c) any significant alteration to any associated procedures for administering this policy.

Where a full review of the Policy is undertaken, the council will adopt local government good practice guidelines and undertake a broad consultation that includes relevant statutory and voluntary sector organisations, tenant representatives, and applicants to the Policy.

#### **1.4: Key aims and objectives of the Policy**

- To meet the legal requirements placed on the council to give appropriate priority to applicants who fall under the Housing Act “reasonable preference groups”. This is to ensure that social rented housing is let to those in greatest need
- To make the best use of the social housing owned by the council
- To have a system for assessing applications and allocating homes that is transparent and easy to understand
- To have a Policy that treats all sectors of the community fairly
- To offer choice to applicants wherever practicable
- To meet the wider objectives of the council’s housing strategy, homelessness strategy, tenancy strategy and tenancy policy
- To promote sustainable and mixed communities

## Section 2: Who can apply to join the Housing Register and how we will assess you

### 2.0: The eligibility rules

Some groups of people cannot, by law, join the Council's Housing Register regardless of their housing need or circumstances. These are people who:

- come under a government rule which means they cannot lawfully access social housing as they are not eligible to do so, or
- do not live habitually in the 'Common Travel Area' (UK, Channel Islands, the Isle of Man or the Republic of Ireland), or
- do not have the right to live in the UK, or
- fall under other categories of people who the Government may in the future decide are not eligible for housing assistance.

The key relevant regulations that apply to eligibility are:

- Regulations 3 and 4 Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006, SI 2006/1294, and
- All subsequent amendments including 'The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (SI 2019/861), plus
- The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/667) implemented from the 24 August 2020.

The above is not a complete list of all the eligibility regulations. For example, there is significant legislation that relates to the UK's exit from the European Union and the implications for accessing housing assistance. These rules are complicated. Anyone who is impacted, or believes they may be impacted, can approach the council for advice, or can seek independent legal advice.

### 2.1: The qualification rules adopted by the council

Under Section 160ZA(7) of the Housing Act 1996 Part 6 a Council is allowed to set criteria for classes of persons who are, or are not, qualifying persons. The rules adopted by the Council mean that the following classes of person will not normally qualify to join the Housing Register unless the Council accepts there are exceptional circumstances. These rules include the circumstances under which an applicant will not be allowed to qualify for the Housing Register and the circumstances under which an applicant can be removed from the Register.

Note: references to applicant throughout this Policy are to be taken to mean the applicant and any member of the applicant's household unless specifically stated.

### 2.2: Non qualification rule 1: A local residential connection



To qualify for the Housing Register an applicant must have a residential connection, within the terms of this Allocation Policy, which will normally mean that an applicant currently lives in the borough and has done so for a minimum of five years in the last seven years, with no more than two separate occasions outside of the borough.

Households placed in accommodation outside of the borough by the council in meeting its statutory homelessness duties to provide temporary accommodation will also have a residential connection as long as in total they fulfil the five-year residential connection.

Once registered, an applicant must continue to meet the residential connection qualification rule. If the applicant no longer meets this rule, they will be removed from the Housing Register as they will no longer qualify for inclusion.

Persons who have been admitted or detained in the local authority area (e.g., in prison, custody, or hospital), will not be able to establish a local connection as this does not constitute being resident in the local government boundaries set for the borough of Stevenage by choice.

People in the following categories will not normally be considered as having a residential connection:

- a) households applying for housing through this Allocation Policy that are still owed any homelessness duty by any other local housing authority under the Housing Act 1996 Part 7. They will be regarded as non-qualifying persons regardless of whether they have been placed in the Council's area or not. This is because the other local authority retains the responsibility for assisting that applicant.
- b) those placed in the borough of Stevenage in residential or supported housing by another Council.
- c) those who do not meet the residential criteria but who have family members in this borough, or who are employed in the borough.

For the purposes of determining a local connection for residence, the Council will accept the following circumstances as demonstrating residence:

- a) Residency in a non-traditional dwelling, such as a mobile home that is placed on a residential site, or an official pitch.
- b) People sleeping rough in the Stevenage area as who can demonstrate a local connection. .

### **2.3: Exceptions to the 5 year residential connection rule**

These are:

- a) Where the Council agrees there are very exceptional circumstances requiring a move into the area. This will be decided on a case-by-case basis. Examples include:

- reasons of safety, for example when an applicant is fleeing domestic abuse or hate crime from another area. This includes currently residing in a Stevenage refuge for a minimum of six months, or
  - an applicant is on a witness protection program and the council has agreed that a move to Stevenage is essential; or
  - where the council agrees there is a very exceptional need to live in the area to provide or receive essential support.
- b) An applicant owed the Main Housing Duty under Section 193 of the Housing Act 1996, or a relief duty under Section 189B (2) where the applicant is, at the point of that 189B duty being accepted, considered likely to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless, whether a decision to that effect has been made or not.
- c) An application from a Gypsy or Traveller household where the applicant may not fully meet the five-year continuous period of residence rule, if that period has been broken by travelling. The facts of each case will be considered when deciding whether the rule should be waived, and the applicant must have spent the majority of the last 5 years residing in Stevenage.
- d) A young person owed leaving care duties under Section 23C of the Children's Act 1989, looked after by Hertfordshire County Council or any other County or Unitary Council, where at any time they were looked after in Stevenage will be considered to have established a local connection to Stevenage until they reach the age of 21 (when this duty will cease, or 25 if they are pursuing a program of education agreed in their pathway plan).
- e) A young person who has been provided with accommodation under Section 22A of the Children Act 1989 (provision of accommodation for children in care) who has resided in Stevenage for a continuous period of at least two years will be considered to have established a local connection to the area even if some of that period accrued before that person turned 16 years old.
- f) Any applicant over the age of 60 who is willing to accept an offer of a hard-to-let specialist accommodation for older people property. Note, such applicants will not be considered for general needs properties or specialist accommodation for older persons housing that is not considered to be hard to let.
- g) Applicants who satisfy the 'Right to Move' criteria. The Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Right to Move) Regulations 2015 state that local connection qualification rules must not be applied to existing social tenants who seek to move from another council in England, and who have a need to move for work related reasons to avoid hardship. However, under this Allocation Policy, Stevenage Council will limit these moves to no more than 1% of all lettings per year via a direct offer only.

See appendix 3 for details of how the 'Right to Move' criteria will be applied.

- h) Where, at the date of application, the applicant is not currently resident in Stevenage whilst:

- receiving medical or respite care; or
- serving a custodial sentence, or
- adhering to bail conditions, or
- is a student living in student accommodation and studying outside of Stevenage
- living in supported housing outside of Stevenage

In all these circumstances, the applicant must have been living in Stevenage for five years in the last seven years prior to their current circumstances.

- i) Applicants who satisfy the Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Armed Forces) (England) Regulations 2012. These are:
- a) applicants who are serving members of the regular armed forces.
  - b) applicants who served in the regular armed forces within the 5 years immediately prior to the date of their application.
  - c) applicants who are serving or former serving members of the regular armed forces or reserve forces who suffer from a serious injury, illness or disability sustained as a result of their service.
  - d) applicants who are a bereaved spouse/civil partner of a former serving member of the regular armed forces and have recently ceased (or will soon cease) to be entitled to reside in services accommodation following the death of their spouse/civil partner; or
  - e) the divorced or separated ex-spouse of a member of HM Armed Forces, who is currently serving or going through resettlement, will be exempt from the local connection criteria for a period of six months following the divorce or separation

Applicants who fulfil any of the exception criteria will not be required to prove a local connection in order to be accepted onto the housing register, although the other qualifying criteria set out in this policy will still apply.

There is an exception to this rule for applicants over the age of 60 who are willing to be considered for a hard to let specialist accommodation for older people's property only. This exception to the requirement to have a local connection is because the evidence is that a number of older applicants are able to receive an offer of specialist accommodation for older person housing or age restricted housing as there is a greater availability for this type of housing. Note applicants who qualify under this exemption will only be considered for age restricted hard to let specialist accommodation for older people properties and will not be considered for general needs properties.

#### **2.4: Non-qualification rule 2: Housing need**

Applicants who do not meet the housing need criteria for an award of a band 1-3 will not be admitted to the Housing Register.

#### **2.5: Non-qualification rule 3: Unacceptable behaviour**

The non-qualification rule for unacceptable behaviour will apply where an applicant, or any member of their household, has demonstrated serious unacceptable behaviour that, in the view of the council, makes them at the time of their application, or since their application, unsuitable to be a tenant.

The unacceptable behaviour disqualification rule will also apply to applicants currently on the Housing Register. An applicant's eligibility to remain on the Housing Register will be kept under review and an applicant may be rendered ineligible should the council be satisfied that the rule relating to unacceptable behaviour should be applied to their case.

Examples of unacceptable behaviour that may result in a decision that an applicant will not qualify to join the housing register include:

- a) they or a member of their household has committed anti-social behaviour in or around the vicinity of their home that has resulted in an ASBO, ABC, injunction or other legal deterrent being issued within the past five years.
- b) they or a member of their household have a conviction for using their accommodation, or allowing it to be used, for illegal or immoral purposes such as drug dealing, within the past five years.
- c) they have been evicted from a tenancy by a social or private landlord for a breach of tenancy conditions, including non-payment of rent, within the past five years.
- d) failing to maintain any previous social rented or private rented property within the terms of their tenancy agreement, or committing acts causing or likely to cause nuisance or annoyance to neighbours or others in the area where they live or have previously lived.
- e) conduct likely to cause nuisance or annoyance if they were to be offered a tenancy. This is conduct or behaviour that does not only relate to a previous social housing or private rented sector tenancy. It may include the circumstances where an applicant, or a member of their current or prospective household, is the subject of actions being taken by any council (or some other recognised body) on grounds of alleged antisocial behaviour (ASB).
- f) circumstances where the applicant, or any member of their household, has assaulted a member of the council's staff, whether or not an injunction is being sought, or has been obtained.
- g) being subject to a court order (including an interim order) for breach of tenancy conditions.
- h) conviction for illegal or immoral use of their current or former home.
- i) causing nuisance and annoyance to neighbours or visitors.
- j) committing criminal offences that still pose a threat to neighbours or the community such as drug dealing.
- k) being violent towards a partner or members of the family. The council does not tolerate any form of domestic abuse.
- l) allowing the condition of the property to deteriorate in avoidable circumstances.
- m) paying money illegally to obtain a tenancy.
- n) unlawfully subletting their tenancy.

- o) applicants who have been convicted of housing or welfare benefit related fraud, where that conviction is unspent under the Rehabilitation Offenders Act 1974.
- p) having unspent convictions where an assessment by the Council concludes that the applicant is unsuitable to be a tenant due to a significant risk to potential neighbours and/or communities.
- q) an applicant or any member of their household has been responsible for any racial harassment or other hate crime. 'Racial harassment' and 'hate crimes' are defined as racist, religiously aggravated, faith, gender, age, disability, and trans phobic or homophobic or gender re-assignment harassment or hate crime. A hate crime or racist incident is defined as any incident which is perceived to be racist or hate crime related by the complainant or any other person.

The assessing officer will be guided by the following framework when assessing whether an applicant should not qualify based on their unacceptable behaviour:

- a) The behaviour need not have led to possession, prosecution, or other enforcement action by a statutory agency, provided that, on the balance of probability, the household is responsible.
- b) in normal circumstances the behaviour concerned should have occurred within the last five years. In cases of a more serious nature, for example, those involving criminal prosecution, a longer timescale may be appropriate if the applicant still poses a threat to neighbours and community.
- c) there must be reasonable grounds for believing that the behaviour could continue or be repeated. For example, the applicant may have issued threats, or there might be a history of repeat offending.

When assessing whether behaviour may result in the applicant not qualifying the assessing officer will consider:

- a) the seriousness of the applicant's behaviour.
- b) the duration of the behaviour and/or the number and frequency of incidents.
- c) the length of time that has elapsed since the behaviour took place.
- d) any relevant vulnerability or support needs that may explain the behaviour.
- e) whether there is meaningful engagement with support agencies.
- f) critically, whether there has been a significant and sustained change in the applicant's behaviour.
- g) whether they believe on the evidence that the behaviour is likely to still reoccur now or at the point a tenancy was offered or commenced.
- h) whether the circumstances that caused the behaviour have changed. For example, whether nuisance was caused by drug or alcohol problems that the applicant has since successfully resolved.
- i) whether the member of the household responsible for the behaviour is still a member of the household.
- j) whether the council can accept a voluntary acceptable behaviour agreement from the applicant setting out the behaviour that is expected of them for future tenancies.

- k) if the unacceptable behaviour is believed to be due to physical, mental or learning difficulties, whether, with appropriate support, the applicant could maintain a tenancy.

Applicants to whom the rule is applied will be written to and informed that:

- a) the unacceptable behaviour rule has been applied to their case and either they do not qualify, or that they qualify but cannot be considered for an allocation until the behaviour has been resolved.
- b) what they must do to resolve the problem.
- c) where an applicant is disqualified for unacceptable behaviour they will be informed that they have a right to ask for a review of the decision made to disqualify them.

Non-qualification will apply until the applicant (or a member of their prospective household) has demonstrated, to the satisfaction of the council, their previous unacceptable conduct is unlikely to reoccur. This may include demonstrating cooperation with support agencies leading to a substantial improvement in behaviour.

Where an applicant is disqualified, any new application will only be reconsidered at the request of the applicant and only where there has been no reasonable cause for complaint or concern against the applicant (or members of their prospective household) for a continuous period of 12 months. It is the applicant's responsibility to notify the council when they have, in their view, resolved the issue and they will need to present evidence to back up their view as part of any new application.

An applicant may re-apply to join the housing register after 12 months. During this time they will be expected to demonstrate behaviour that would make them suitable to be a tenant, such as no further anti-social or criminal behaviour in or around the vicinity of their home and/or no further breaches of tenancy conditions. In the event of an offer of accommodation being made, it will be subject to a probationary period by way of an introductory tenancy, during which time the applicant will be expected to continue to demonstrate reasonable behaviour.

#### **2.6: Non qualification rule 4: Former or current rent arrears or another housing related debt.**

This section sets out the rules for when an applicant:

- a) Will not be allowed to qualify for the Housing Register because of former or current rent arrears or another housing related debt, or
- b) Will be allowed to qualify but will not be allowed to bid for any properties advertised until their rent arrears or housing related debt have been resolved to the satisfaction of the Council.

This section explains the rules relating to:

- a) Current or former rent arrears or another housing related debt owed to Stevenage Council, or another Council or a Registered Provider
- b) Current or former rent arrears owed to a private sector landlord

**Current or former rent arrears or another housing related debt owed to Stevenage Council**

Generally, applicants who have housing related debt will either:

- a) not qualify to join the housing register if the debt owed is over £1,000, or
- b) can qualify but not be entitled to be made an allocation of housing until the debt is resolved as per the rules set out below. If allowed to join the register they will be ineligible to bid until the debt has been resolved but they will still be allocated a band and will accrue their time in band whilst they take action to resolve the debt as per the rules set out in this section of the policy.

Housing related debt includes but is not limited to:

- a) Any current or former tenant rent arrears or charges for use and occupation owed to any local authority, registered provider or private sector landlord
- b) Unpaid sundry debts owing to any local authority, registered provider or private sector landlord, including rechargeable debts or court costs
- c) Any unpaid Right to Buy discounts from previously owned property
- d) Any tenancy deposit or rent in advance loans provided by the council that remain unpaid; or tenancy deposit guarantees that have been honoured by the council and remain unpaid
- e) Unpaid rent that was lawfully due to be paid to any local authority or registered provider landlord or any private sector landlord, but such unpaid rent is now unrecoverable in law because of bankruptcy proceedings
- f) Outstanding council tax debts.
  - a) Outstanding re-chargeable repairs
  - b) Current and former housing related service charge arrears
  - c) Temporary accommodation charge arrears for a licence or a tenancy where that temporary accommodation was provided by the Council
  - d) Any court costs incurred by the Council or a Housing Association associated with any of the above debts

Housing related debts apply to both the applicant and any partner included in their application.

The purpose of this qualification rule is:

- a) To ensure any relevant debt owed to the Council or a social landlord is recovered and
- b) To consider whether an applicant's current position creates a risk of future non-payment of rent.

The following framework will be used to guide officers when applying this qualification rule. The Council will consider:

- The reasons why the applicant accrued the housing related debt and whether there are exceptional circumstances that should be considered when applying the rule.
- Whether the debt has been caused by factors difficult for the applicant to control, for example a case where an applicant was genuinely unable to pay the full rent due to being impacted by the 'spare room subsidy' rule. This is also known as the "bedroom tax"
- Whether the applicant still owes that debt, and if they do, the extent of the arrears/debt as well as whether it is a recoverable debt, or a statute barred debt.
- Whether the applicant has taken debt advice, acted on it, and entered into an arrangement to clear the arrears/debt.
- If an arrangement has been made, the amount of arrears/debt paid off, any amount outstanding, and the regularity of payments made.

After considering the above the Council will decide whether the applicant will not qualify for the housing register, or that they will be allowed to qualify, but not allowed to bid for properties until the issue has been resolved to the satisfaction of the Council. Debts of over £1,000 will mean that the applicant automatically does not qualify for the housing register until that debt has been reduced to under that amount, after which the rules set out below must be met before they will be considered for an offer of accommodation.

In cases of current tenant rent arrears under £1,000 the applicant must have made a repayment commitment to clear the debt and are making regular payments of an agreed sum which they have maintained for a period of at least six months, which will normally mean not having missed a single payment; and the arrears have reduced to a figure that is equal to or less than six weeks payable rent. At this stage the application will be re-assessed and allowed to bid.

However, the applicant will be expected to continue making regular payments of the agreed sum until the debt is cleared – if payments are missed then the application will again be suspended from bidding until the arrears are cleared or payments have been made satisfactorily for at least a further three months.

If arrears are still outstanding when the applicant is successful in bidding, they will be expected to sign an agreement to continue the agreed payments after they have moved.

For all other housing related debt under £1,000 the applicant will be banded but be suspended from bidding until the debt is cleared in full. It will be the responsibility of the applicant to advise the lettings team when the debt is cleared in full and provide written evidence of this.

For applicants who are assessed as not qualifying for the housing register there is no time limit regarding when a person can make a new application following disqualification under this rule. Where a new application is made, the Council will assess whether the applicant has taken appropriate action to address the rent arrears/debt.



If disqualified an applicant will be informed of the actions they need to take to resolve the debt in order to qualify.

Note: Tenants would not usually be allowed to move home if they have a current housing debt owed to the council, however we will consider allowing tenants in arrears to downsize; on the basis that smaller accommodation will be cheaper to rent and it will be cheaper to run. An affordability assessment will be carried out with the housing staff to identify the financial benefit and/or impact of downsizing. This will be at the discretion of Stevenage Borough Council. Incentive payments will be offset against arrears. Where applicable, we will refer tenants with significant arrears, where the downsizing payment would not be enough to offset it, to apply for the Discretionary Housing Fund.

Note: For applicants who have had their rent arrears included in a 'Debt Relief Order', bankruptcy declaration or individual voluntary agreement (IVA) a period of at least 12 months has to pass from the declaration of insolvency to the point a debt is cleared. Should an applicant maintain their finances for this period, this will be considered as strong evidence that their previous problem has been resolved.

### **Current or former rent arrears owed to a private sector landlord**

The Council normally only consider rent arrears from an applicant's last private rented tenancy in the circumstances where the council has obtained information that confirms on the balance of probabilities that a debt is owed. If there is a debt owed it will be for the assessing officer to decide on the facts gathered, the level of debt and the reasons for it, whether the applicant should be classified as a non-qualifying or should be allowed to qualify and if so whether they should be suspended from bidding until the debt is resolved. Where it is established that a debt is owed the same rules will apply as per a social housing debt above.

Where an applicant or their partner has held a private rented tenancy in the last 5 years the Council will write to their last landlord or lettings agency to enquire as to the reasons why the tenancy was terminated and whether there were any rent arrears at the point the applicant left the property. Applicants should not be penalised in the circumstances where a landlord or lettings agency fails to reply within 6 weeks. A further reminder will be sent and an attempt to obtain information through telephoning the landlord or agent. If no reply has been obtained within 6 weeks the applicant will be allowed onto the register and will be able to bid for properties.

The Council will only contact the landlord or agent for the last rented property. However, where it comes to the attention of the Council that there were significant rent arrears relating to a previous private rented tenancy in the last 5 years that was not the applicant's last tenancy, a decision will be taken on the facts of the case whether to suspend the applicant from bidding until the debt is resolved.

### **2.8: Non qualification rule 5: Fraudulent applications**

It is an offence for a person approaching the Council seeking an allocation of housing to make a false statement or to withhold information which is relevant to

their claim. This is under section 171 of the Housing Act and is punishable with a fine.

Any applicant seeking to obtain accommodation by making a false or misleading statement, by withholding relevant information, or by failing to inform the council of any material change in circumstances may be prevented from qualifying for the Housing Register, or where they are already registered, may have their application cancelled. Prosecution will be considered where it appears to the council that a criminal offence has been committed. Proceedings for possession will be taken to recover any tenancy granted in consequence of a fraudulent application for housing.

It will be for the housing assessing officer in the first instance to decide if any errors contained in an application were deliberately made or not. If the officer is satisfied that the errors were not deliberate, or that they have no impact on the application, then no action will be taken though the applicant may be warned about the need to provide accurate information and the consequences for not doing so.

Once an applicant is disqualified from joining the register or removed from the register on these grounds they will normally not be able to reapply for a period of 12 months. Decisions will be made based on the seriousness of the attempted fraud or false information given, including an assessment of why information was withheld.

### **2.9: Non qualification rule 6: They are the owner of residential property**

Applicants who are current homeowners in the UK or abroad will not qualify to join the housing register. If another member of an applicant's household, who is included in their application, is a homeowner the applicant will not qualify to join the housing register.

The council defines current homeowners as:

- people who have or are acquiring a freehold or leasehold interest in a residential property whether in sole or joint names. This includes properties purchased under the right to buy or the right to acquire, properties abroad, properties that have been sublet and properties where people have an interest via shared equity or shared ownership (but not those purchased under the Council's Low Start Shared Ownership Policy where only 5% equity is owned)
- people who own or part-own a sited mobile home or houseboat
- people who still have their names on the title deeds of a residential property which has been repossessed but not sold or who still have their names on the title deeds of a property that is for sale, or have an unresolved legal or financial interest in their home (for example through divorce or separation proceedings), will be considered as current homeowners until such time as they can provide documentary proof that they no longer have a legal or financial interest in the property
- someone who has gifted their residential property, or equity from their property, to another person within the last ten years

The council will consider re-housing some owner-occupiers living in Stevenage into specialist accommodation for older persons, (subject to the normal assessments)

when they fulfil certain criteria and are willing to sell their existing property to the council at below market value, in accordance with the Council's Policy on the Purchase of Open Market Properties to Assist Vulnerable Homeowners to Move into More Suitable Accommodation and to Support the Prevention of Homelessness.

Applicants who have been the owner of a residential property within the last 5 years will be required to provide proof of the proceeds from the sale and of the disposal of any proceeds. Where the Council considers that the proceeds from any sale have not been spent reasonably an applicant can still be determined as not qualifying for the housing register. The final decision will be with the manager of the housing allocation.

#### **2.10: Non qualification rule 7: Current Council and Housing Association tenants who apply within 1 year of the commencement of their current tenancy**

Any applicant who is a Council or Housing Association tenant will not normally be allowed to join the Housing Register for a period of 1 year (from the start date of their current tenancy), however in some circumstances exceptions may apply such as for example:

A change in their circumstances which would mean that they should be awarded a Band 1-3 under this policy such as the property is no longer suitable for tenants (or a member of their household) due to a disability or the property/location is severely impacting on their health and wellbeing.

Each case will be assessed on its own merit.

#### **2.11: Disqualification rule 8: Refusal of 2 suitable offers in a 3 year period**

This is a disqualification rule that will be applied to applicants who are already included on the Housing Register.

Any applicant who refuses 2 suitable offers within a 3 year period will be disqualified from the housing register and not allowed to reapply for a period of 12 months (see the separate policy below in section 4 that is relevant for applicants owed a statutory homeless duty who refuse one suitable offer). They will then have to reapply to join the housing register and, if they qualify to join, their effective date within any band awarded will not be backdated to their original band date before they were disqualified.

#### **2.12: Disqualification rule 9: Failure to Bid**

This is a disqualification rule that will be applied to applicants who are already included on the Housing Register.

Any applicant who has failed to bid for more than twelve months on suitable and available properties will be removed from the Housing Register to reduce the administrative burden of maintaining the register. This is based on the assumption that an applicant who has not bid for accommodation in 12 months is unlikely to continue to be in housing need. Any applicant removed from the register can reapply if they have a housing need with a new start date.

The Council will monitor the bidding patterns to identify applicants who fail to bid and identify any applicants where their failure to bid could be the result of a vulnerability and not being able to understand the bidding system. In these circumstances the rule will not be applied.

### **2.13: Exceptional circumstances**

Stevenage Borough Council will retain the ability, in exceptional circumstances, to exercise its discretion when applying any of the qualification rules listed, or any other rule adopted under this policy. Any person who is not a qualifying person by reason of the above criteria may be deemed to be a qualifying person for exceptional circumstances by the manager of the housing allocation.

Where in their application to join the Housing Register an applicant makes a case for discretion to be applied for exceptional circumstances, this will be considered as part of the application. Otherwise, where the case for discretion has not been made out as part of the application, the applicant will have a second chance to make the case for why discretion should be applied through the review process. For example, where an applicant has requested a review for a decision that they do not qualify, or a decision as to what band is owed, they may make the case for why discretion should be applied to their case for exceptional circumstances.

It is for the applicant to request a review and make the case for why discretion should be applied to their case for exceptional circumstances. A request for a review by an applicant of a decision that an applicant does not meet a qualification rule, or for any rule in the policy to be waived, will be taken as a request for any exceptional circumstances to be considered. This request for review should be within 21 days of their application being refused.

Where requested, the council will consider whether the applicant's circumstances (or those of a member of the applicant's household) are so exceptional that discretion should be applied.

The applicant will receive a written decision on their claim for exceptional circumstances to be applied within 56 days and, where that decision is that the case is not considered to be exceptional, reasons will be given.

Note the council cannot waive the eligibility rules for any applicant who is not allowed to access social housing under the immigration and 'persons from abroad' rules set by Central Government.

In deciding whether an applicant's circumstances are exceptional the council will fully consider the Equality Act 2010 and Children Act 2004 where children are part of the applicant's household. With regard to the Equality Act, the council will specifically consider:

- a) whether the person, or a member of their household, meets the definition for one or more of the nine protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act 2010

- b) if we agree that the applicant or a member of their household comes under the definition for a protected characteristic, the council will fully comply with Section 149 of 2010 Equality Act and ensure it has obtained all relevant information relating to the applicant's protected characteristic and will consider that if they were not able to qualify for the Policy, whether this would have an exceptionally detrimental impact on the person with that protected characteristic: and
- c) ensure any decision that the applicant's circumstances are not exceptional will be a decision that is a proportionate means of achieving the legitimate objectives for the policy.

## Section 3: Applying to join the Housing Register

### 3.0: How to apply to join the Housing Register

Anyone over the age of 16 can apply to join the Council's Housing Register. Applications will be rejected if:

- a) they are ineligible to be considered by law; or
- b) they come within one of the 'non qualification' categories adopted by the Council (see section 2 of the Policy).

The Stevenage Borough Council website provides an online housing application form to join the Housing Register. <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/>

Any applicant who may need help in completing their on-line application can contact the council on 01438 242242 where they will be guided through the process of making their application on-line or offered an appointment.

There is free access to the 'internet' at libraries, and at some community facilities. A home visit or office appointment can be offered when an applicant has no access to the 'internet' or is unable to use the 'internet', in exceptional circumstances.

A 16 or 17 year old applicant who is accepted onto the housing register will not normally be considered for a tenancy until they are 18. If in exceptional circumstances a person who is 16 or 17 is granted a tenancy, this will normally be held in trust until they reach the age of 18. This means that another suitable person (such as a parent, legal guardian, social worker or relative) will normally be responsible for the tenancy. Priority will only be given for a home located in an area that will enable the necessary support to be provided.

### 3.1: Verifying the application

At point of making the application the Council will not be collecting identification documents or checking circumstances, other than for the qualification rules which include whether there is a local connection, a housing need, or whether the applicant is a homeowner, or has a housing related debt, or may have unacceptable behaviour. The Council will also ask for any medical information that may affect the decision on the band to be awarded. Further verification information will be requested if the applicant were to receive an offer of accommodation.

An applicant should not send in any original documents in the post unless this has been expressly requested. When any verification documents are requested, they should make an appointment to visit the Council's Customer Service Centre where copies will be taken of the documents and the originals returned at the same time. The Council may accept digital copies of documents asked for.

Once the application has been received, if there is a need for additional information we will request this. Any application forms that are not fully completed or, where verification evidence required has not been provided, cannot be processed meaning that an applicant will not be able to access the housing register until the information is fully completed and assessed.

All incomplete applications will be cancelled after a period of 28 days measured from the date further information has been requested. If cancelled, this does not prevent the applicant making a subsequent application at a later date, although in such cases the applicant's effective date of registration would not be backdated to the date of the earlier application.

The Council will make enquiries it considers necessary in order to verify and assess an application for housing. This may involve contacting previous landlords, health or medical advisors, police etc. Applications will be processed within a reasonable period of time (relative to the particulars facts given in the application) after all documentation has been received.

If accepted onto the Housing Register the applicant will be informed of:

- a) The band they have been placed in (this determines priority)
- b) The date of application (this is used to determine priority within the band allocated)
- c) The size and type of properties for which they can bid
- d) Their application reference number (applicants will need this to bid)
- e) How to seek a review against their banding if they think it is wrong.

If an application to join the housing register is refused the applicant will be informed in writing and will have a right to review the decision made.

### **3.2: Persons entitled to be considered as part of the application**

Sole applications or joint applications may be accepted. Joint applicants will be accepted in the following circumstances.

The council will accept joint housing register applications from couples where both are aged 16 years or over and are married or civil partners; or have lived together for at least six months; or have a child of their relationship, provided each applicant is eligible and qualifies to join the register in their own right. If they do not qualify, we would accept them as a member of the applicants household.

Persons entitled to assistance must be members of the applicant's immediate family who normally reside with the applicant. Any other person or persons will only be considered as part of the household if the council is satisfied that it is reasonable for that person to reside with the applicant. This will exclude lodgers or anyone sub-letting from the applicant.

Applicants should only include persons on their application who will be a permanent member of their household and who will be occupying the accommodation offered as their only or principal home.

People who usually live with the applicant but are temporarily absent due to circumstances beyond their control (for example, they are in prison on a short-term sentence, or in the care of the local authority, staying in hospital, or undertaking a college or university course), may be considered as a 'usual' household member at the discretion of the council, and depending on the facts presented.

Specifically, a person's housing application can include the following household members:

- a) spouses or civil partners where the applicant lives with and/or intends to live with their spouse or civil partner.
- b) partners where the applicant is currently cohabiting
- c) children who reside with and are dependent upon the applicant. Children are defined as under 18 for these purposes.
- d) permanent, full time, live in carers residing with the applicant at the date of application will be considered as part of the household if written confirmation of the applicant's need for a permanent, full time, live in carer is received from the relevant Social Services department.
- e) any other household member such as an adult child where it is accepted that:
  - they have been part of the applicant's household for a period of 12 months prior to their application to the council; and
  - they reside with the applicant as part of their household and
  - the applicant will need to demonstrate that this is not a short term or temporary arrangement.

The council will not generally consider the following as permanent members of a household, and they will not be included when assessing what size and/or type of property the applicant can be allocated:

- a) Non-dependant adult relatives
- b) non-relatives
- c) non-resident carers
- d) lodgers
- e) live-in help
- f) children for whom the applicant or their partner has staying arrangements but who are not permanent members of the household
- g) Family members who do not currently reside in the UK

The council may also refuse to consider an application for assistance or someone's inclusion on an application if the person concerned (i.e., other than the applicant) has made a separate housing application.

The council may choose to carry out a visit to the applicant's current residence if their priority is sufficient for an allocation of housing under this Allocation Policy. Visits conducted may include an inspection of the accommodation and facilities..

Joint tenancies are normally granted by the Council or a Private Registered Provider where applicants have a long-term commitment, for example, married, or unmarried couples, or civil partners. This decision is for the Council or the relevant Private Registered Provider offering accommodation, who will decide whether to allow a joint tenancy depending on the circumstances.



### **3.3: Households with access to children/shared residency order or Child Arrangement Orders**

As part of the assessment process the Council will record whether an applicant has children that live with them part of the week and whether or not this arrangement is set by the court or not.

Where residence of dependent children under 18 has been agreed between the parents, by consent or by a Court Order, and the council is being asked to include them as part of an applicant's household, the council will verify their permanent and/or principal home by applying the test set out in Section 189(1)(b) of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to decide whether any child both lives with and is dependent on the applicant.

Examples of the facts that the Council will consider when applying this test are:

- which parent/guardian receives benefits, such as child benefit/; and
- which parent/guardian arranges and pays for any childcare arrangements; and
- the home address and next of kin which the child/ren's school and GP have registered for them

and by checking the identity of the parents/guardian shown on the birth certificate(s), and if necessary, carrying out a home visit.

If an applicant can show that their child/ren has their permanent and/or principal home with them and are therefore dependent upon them, they can be included as part of the applicant's household. Following this assessment there will be a small number of cases where it is agreed that children live with the applicant on a 'shared arrangement' even though they do not exclusively live with the applicant.

In these cases, even though the child/children can be included as part of the application there will be a number of factors that will be considered when deciding what size accommodation can be offered. These factors include:

- a) The ability of the applicant to afford the rent with or without help from benefits
- b) The availability and popularity of family housing in any area that an applicant expresses a preference to live in. For example, a partner housing association may be willing to be more flexible where a vacancy relates to a flat than a house as long as the rent is assessed as being affordable.

### **3.4: Applications from elected council members, staff members or relations**

To ensure the council is seen to be treating all applicants fairly, any application for housing or rehousing from members of the council or employees of the council must be disclosed.

If an applicant has a connection with the council they are treated no differently than any other applicant. However, before any offer of accommodation is made this must be authorised by the Assistant Director responsible for Housing or other senior officer designated by the Assistant Director. For this purpose an applicant with a

connection includes the following circumstances plus the level of authorisation required:

- Any applicant who is a current elected member of the Council, or a former elected member of the Council
- Any applicant who is a current member of staff of the Council
- Any applicant who is a former member of staff of the Housing Service within the past 10 years
- A close relative of any current member of the Council's Housing Service defined as mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, partner, nephew, niece, uncle, aunt, grandparent, or grandchild - partners and people living together are treated in the same way as if they were married.

Lobbying on behalf of any person is not allowed in any circumstances by, or on behalf of, a councillor or member of staff.

### **3.5: Applications from Care Leavers**

A care leaver who meets the criteria is:

- a) a care leaver who originates from Stevenage and meets the requirements for housing under the Leaving Care Act 2000 as being an eligible, relevant or former relevant person aged 18-21 (24 if in full time education), or
- b) a care leaver who does not originate from Stevenage but has been placed into foster care or residential care in Stevenage and has been resident in Stevenage for five continuous years and meets the requirements for housing under the Leaving Care Act 2000 as being an eligible, relevant or former relevant person aged 18-21 (24 if in full time education).

Hertfordshire Children's Services will refer the young person to live independently under the terms of the Joint Housing Protocol when it has been evidenced that the young person is assessed as ready. The referral must be made no less than 6 months before the applicant wishes to access housing. If the young person is 20 years old the move on application must be submitted at least six months before they turn 21 years or if they are in full time education 6 months before they turn 25.

The applicant must have an agreed support package and an up to date comprehensive pathway plan and risk assessment in place. The housing staff will consider the referral from Children's Services, and if satisfied that the care leaver is ready to move-on and that all support services are in place for the transition to living independently, will recommend that the application is placed into band 2.

Until the criteria is met for assessing whether a care leaver is ready to be housed they will be allowed to join the register but suspended from bidding.

### **3.6: Move on from supported housing**

A person who meets the criteria is a person who is living in specialist supported accommodation (other than specialist accommodation for older persons) in Stevenage and qualifies under this Policy. The applicant will have been assessed by their care co-ordinator or social worker as having on-going support needs but ready

to live independently with continuing support. The applicant must have a care plan and support package in place for the transition to move into general housing accommodation.

When the tenancy support team receive a referral from the applicant's care co-ordinator or social worker the case will be referred to the Special Needs Panel for a decision. If the Special Needs Panel agrees that the applicant is ready to move-on and that all support services are in place for the transition to move into general housing accommodation, the panel will recommend that the application is moved to band 2.

Until the criteria is met for assessing whether a person in supported housing is ready to move on to a tenancy they will be allowed to join the register but suspended from bidding.

### **3.7: Checks into any court cases or unspent criminal convictions**

All applicants and members of their prospective household will be requested to disclose any pending court cases or unspent criminal convictions.

The council may use any information disclosed (or any other information obtained during the assessment or following registration) to ascertain whether the applicant should be disqualified from joining, or from remaining on the Housing Register, after applying the serious unacceptable behaviour rule.

Spent convictions are not required to be disclosed and will not be taken into account in assessing a person's eligibility to join the Housing Register. The assessment will consider whether there is evidence of any current serious unacceptable behaviour regardless of whether a person has been convicted in the past for that behaviour.

If the council decides that, on the information obtained during the assessment process, there is a pressing need for a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, or further information from the Probation Service, relevant inquiries will be made.

Information gained will not automatically exclude an applicant from the Housing Register. Information received may also be used to make informed decisions about the suitability of any property that may be offered.

All assessments will be carried out in accordance with data protection and information sharing policies and other legal requirements.

### **3.8: Assessing Applications**

To assess an applicant's housing need and their acceptance on to the Housing Register the policy has adopted a 'needs based' banding system detailed in section 5.

Any band awarded reflects an applicant's housing need with the higher the band awarded reflecting the greater level of housing need.

Applicants will be required to make a declaration, or to give informed consent, to confirm their understanding that:

- a) The information given is correct and that they will notify the Council of any change in their circumstances.
- b) Enquiries will be made concerning their eligibility for housing and level of priority.
- c) Information will be provided to other partner organisations that are part of the Policy.

Once an applicant provides information, the Council will process that information under Article 6 General Data Protection Regulation. The processing is necessary under the 'Public Task' purpose and is necessary for the Council to perform a task in the public interest or for its official functions, in this case to meet its legal responsibility to assess housing applications, and we are satisfied that the task or function has a clear basis in law.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide all the information requested to assess their circumstances, and to provide any supporting information or documents that are requested. Incomplete applications will not be made active until such time as the Council is satisfied that it has in its possession all of the information it requires to complete its assessment.

The Council may request information or a reference from an applicant's current or previous social or private rented landlord. An applicant should not be disadvantaged if, despite every effort, it is not possible to obtain a reference from their current or previous landlord.

All applications are subject to verification checks and depending on the verification check required these may be applied:

- At the point of initial application
- Following any change of circumstance notified to the Council by the applicant
- Following any routine validation audits
- Following an annual review of the application
- At the point of an offer of accommodation
- At the point of letting

### **3.9: The requirement to inform the council of any change of circumstances**

Applicants are required to inform the council in writing of any material change in their circumstances that may affect their priority for housing. Examples of a change in circumstances include but are not limited to:

- a) a change of address or contact details, for either themselves or members of their household
- b) a change in their medical condition or disability (either existing or newly acquired)
- c) additional family members or other people they wish to add to their application (It will be for the council to decide whether they will allow additional people to join the application)

- d) any family member or any other person on the application who has left their household; and/or

Applications may be temporarily suspended while the council assesses the information provided by the applicant and completes further enquiries that may be necessary.

Where following a change in an applicant's circumstances this results in a change to the applicant's application or banding, they will be informed in writing.

### **3.10: Cancelling applications**

An application will be cancelled from the Housing Register in the following circumstances:

- a) at the request of an applicant
- b) where an applicant does not respond to an application review, within the specified time set out in any correspondence sent to them
- c) where the Council or Private Registered Provider has housed the applicant
- d) when a tenant completes a mutual exchange
- e) where the applicant moves and does not provide a contact address
- f) where the applicant has died
- g) where, at the housing application or any reassessment, an applicant has not supplied information requested within 28 days
- h) where an applicant already registered becomes ineligible or is disqualified under the rules adopted for this policy
- i) where the applicant buys a property either through the Right to Buy or Right to Acquire or through the open market or inherits a property.

Any applicant whose application has been cancelled has the right to ask for a review of that decision.

### **3.11: Reviewing an application**

Every active applicant on the Register will have their application reviewed annually, or more frequently if required, to ensure the application information is kept up to date and to efficiently manage the administration of the register.

At the anniversary of the application date, or when carrying out a review, each applicant will be contacted, usually by letter or email, to confirm their application is still required and will be asked to check their application details are still correct against their online portal and update them where necessary. In the instance of an applicant being unable to check and update their online application, a paper review form will be issued and should be returned within the timescales provided.

If an applicant has not responded after 28 days a reminder will be sent by email or by letter. If no response is received to the reminder then the application will be cancelled.

### **3.12: Deliberate worsening of circumstances**

Social housing in Stevenage is an extremely scarce resource in demand from a very large number of applicants, the majority of who will never receive an offer of accommodation from the council. The council has a responsibility to make the best use of its housing stock by ensuring that allocations of houses are made only to those who are in genuine housing need and who, despite having made every effort to help themselves improve their housing situation, continue to have a housing need. For this reason where there is evidence that an applicant has deliberately made their housing situation worse in order to gain a higher banding, the assessment of their needs will be based on the circumstances before the change in their situation brought about by their actions to deliberately worsen their circumstances.

Examples of deliberately worsening circumstances include:

- applicants who have allowed family members or others to move into their property, who previously had suitable accommodation or the financial means to secure their own accommodation, and this has resulted in the property being overcrowded unless the addition to the household is considered to be unavoidable such as an older relative requiring full time care.
- homeowners who have transferred their property to another family member within the last five years from the date they make their application to the Housing Register.
- applicants who have given up affordable and suitable private rented accommodation that they are able to maintain to move in with other relatives or friends, creating a situation of overcrowding.
- requesting or colluding with a landlord or family member to issue them with a notice to leave their accommodation.

These are examples only. There may be other circumstances in which the council decides that an applicant has deliberately worsened their circumstances.

## Section 4: General Rules and Conditions

### 4.0: The Council's statement on choice

It is a legal requirement for the Council to include within its Allocation Policy a statement on choice.

The Council will let the majority of properties through a system called 'choice-based lettings' (CBL) (but not all properties, see below for when the Council may make a direct offer outside of the CBL system). This means the majority of properties will be advertised and applicants will be able to 'bid' on properties that suit their needs.

Applicants who are eligible to be considered for properties under the policy will be able to express a preference for an area, or areas, in which they would like to live and the type of property they would prefer. However, the ability to satisfy their preferences is extremely limited by the lack of available social housing in the Stevenage area.

While the council is committed to offering applicants accepted onto the housing register as much choice as possible, the vast gap between the supply and demand of social housing means that we expect the refusal of offers of accommodation following a successful bid to be few and far between. However, the considerable housing pressures faced in Stevenage limit the degree of choice that can be offered, along with the responsibility the council has to offer housing to applicants in urgent housing need. These pressures include the need to reduce the financial impact on the council for households placed into temporary accommodation under a homelessness duty.

Therefore, expressing a preference over where an applicant would prefer to live does not mean that preference can be met, or that an applicant won't be offered a direct offer of suitable accommodation outside of their preferred area.

An applicant may be asked at the time of registration to state any area in which they believe they cannot live due to fear of violence, harassment, or domestic abuse. The assessment of their application will then consider the facts and decide whether the applicant can restrict areas.

Priority for Council and Private Registered Provider properties being let as secure, flexible, or assured tenancies will be determined by housing band, with those applicants in Band 1 having a greater priority than those in Bands 2 and 3, and those in Band 2 having a greater priority than those in Bands 3. Within bands, priority will normally be determined by the date the applicant is registered in that band.

In selecting properties to allocate the council will take into account the following factors:

- the number of bedrooms required (as measured against the criteria adopted in this Policy).
- any essential requirement concerning the type or location of housing
- the housing band into which the applicant's case falls, and
- the date registered within that band (except for when a property may be allocated outside of band and date order (see section below for details)

The council will not normally take into account:

- non-essential preferences concerning the location or type of rehousing requested by the applicant, or
- an applicant's preference concerning an allocation of a Council property or a nomination to a Private Registered Provider Housing Association property.

#### **4.1: Penalty for refusing 2 suitable offers in a 3 year period**

Applicants who are made a direct offer or bid successfully under CBL but subsequently fail to attend viewing appointments or refuse an offer of a tenancy without good cause, increase administration time and cost and more importantly are denying other applicants the opportunity to be shortlisted for properties.

An applicant may withdraw their bid for a property without penalty at any stage of the bidding process up to the close of the bidding round. However, if an applicant is the successful bidder on a property but fails to attend a viewing appointment or refuses the offer of a tenancy without good reason, this will count as a reasonable offer refused.

Any applicant who refuses 2 suitable offers within a 3 year period will be disqualified from the housing register and not allowed to reapply for a period of 12 months (see the separate policy below that is relevant for applicants owed a statutory homeless duty who refuse one suitable offer). They will then have to reapply to join the housing register and, if they qualify to join, their effective date within any band awarded will not be backdated to their original band date before they were disqualified.

This adopted rule is intended to tackle the problem of some applicants making a successful bid and then refusing the property offered, which has the impact of increasing the time it takes to re-let that vacant home.

The Council will determine whether an offer was reasonable for an applicant to accept using the reasonable offer criteria set out at appendix 1.

Representations from an applicant that they had good reason to refuse the offer of a tenancy will be considered on a case by case basis. However, since full details of the property such as property type, size, floor level (if applicable), street name and rent due are given on the property advertisement on the Housing Online website, we expect that the number of occasions we would consider a refusal to be reasonable to be very few.

#### **4.2: When the council may choose to make a direct offer outside of the bidding (CBL) system and sometimes outside of the band and date order system**



There will be circumstances in which there are urgent strategic, operational, or financial reasons to make a direct offers outside of the bidding system and/or outside of the normal band and date order criteria. Specific examples include but are not limited to:

- a) people that need to move due to a fire or flood, or severe storm damage to their home.
- b) where there is an evidenced threat to life in the area in which an applicant currently lives for example, people who are at imminent risk of violence and are to be housed through a Witness Protection Programme.
- c) people who it has been agreed must be housed urgently as part of a multi-agency protocol such as a MAPPA, MARRAC case where it is agreed there is a need to manage where a person should be housed.
- d) where a vacant adapted property or a property designed to disability standards becomes available it may be offered to those households with a need for this property type regardless of their band or the date they were registered.
- e) in the case of a secure council tenant who is willing to transfer from a property they do not require, and which is particularly suitable for an applicant with special or support needs.
- f) applicants who have given up their secure council tenancy whilst they are in prison and there is an intention to return.
- g) where an applicant is homeless and in temporary accommodation and owed a Section 189B (2) Relief duty or 193(2) Main duty under the Housing Act 1996 and the council wishes to make a direct offer to move applicants out of temporary accommodation to manage any budgetary or legal requirements placed on the council.
- h) persons whom the council has a duty to rehouse under Section 39 of the Land Compensation Act 1973.
- i) If the applicant has not been bidding for all suitable properties or has been the successful bidder on a property but subsequently refused the offer of a tenancy
- j) a vulnerable applicant where the outcome of an assessment is that a managed let in a particular suitable location is the best letting solution for that applicant; or
- k) special allocation arrangements may also apply in respect of properties available for letting on new-build developments.

- l) where the previous tenant of a vacant property has perpetrated anti-social behaviour and there may be a need to let that property sensitively in respect of understanding the impact on the community of the previous tenant.
- m) where a direct allocation is identified as making best use of the council's housing stock
- n) a property is required to enable a council tenant with no reasonable preference to transfer in the best interests of managing the housing stock
- o) a property is required as a direct allocation under the Council's Policy on the Purchase of Open Market Properties to Assist Vulnerable Homeowners to Move into More Suitable Accommodation.
- p) the applicant is a statutory or discretionary successor to a tenancy and is required to move to a smaller property. In these circumstances the chance to bid for a property will be limited because of the legal rules that require the Council to serve a notice requiring them to move six months after the tenant's death but before 12 months for the notice to be considered valid.

In all of these examples a direct allocation may be made at any time and there is no minimum time that an applicant will be allowed to bid before they can be considered for a direct offer. For example, even though an applicant owed a homeless duty and in temporary accommodation will be allowed to bid under the CBL Housing Online Policy they may still receive a direct offer at any time in order to reduce the financial impact on the Council of temporary accommodation.

Note: Specialist accommodation for older persons properties these will be let entirely outside of the bidding system. They will be let through a direct offer.

Any decision to allocate properties outside of band and date order system will be recorded, with the reasons why an allocation has been made. These will be reported on to members at least annually through a performance report covering all applications and lettings.

Note: Council tenants that may be at risk due to, for example significant repair issues will be decanted and made a direct offer outside of this Allocation Policy. Any offer will be a management initiated move and these transfers sit outside of the legal requirements set under allocations legislation.

#### **4.3: Choice and offers made to any applicant owed a statutory homelessness duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996**

For applicants owed any statutory homelessness duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, the need to offer suitable housing is considered to be more important than allowing an applicant to wait for an offer of accommodation in a location where they would prefer to live. Therefore, there is therefore no minimum time set for when an applicant owed a statutory homeless duty will be allowed to bid for social housing before a direct offer can be considered.

An offer of accommodation for an applicant owed a statutory homeless duty could be either a private rented property, or a social rented property. Should the applicant refuse an offer which is considered both suitable for their needs and reasonable then, subject to the Council's homelessness review procedure, the homelessness duty owed will be discharged and they will lose any priority status granted to them based on the homelessness duty owed.

In these circumstances the Council will then assess whether they have another housing need and otherwise qualify that means they should be awarded bands 1-3. If they don't, they will be removed from the Housing Register.

A statutory homeless duty is defined as:

- a) The prevention of homelessness duty under Section 195(2)
- b) The 'relief of homelessness duty under Section 189B(2)
- c) Where the relief duty has come to an end and an applicant is then owed a section 190 Intentionally homeless temporary accommodation duty to provide them with a reasonable opportunity to secure alternative accommodation for occupation (section 190(2) duty),
- d) The section 193(2) Main Homelessness duty or the section 193C(4) 'reduced' section 193 duty

#### **4.4: When an application may be suspended**

An application can be suspended for various reasons set out in this policy. Where an applicant is suspended the applicant remains on the Housing Register and they will receive a new date in band when their application is made live with the exception of applicants who qualify despite a housing related debt or rent arrears who will be banded and will accrue their time in band but will be suspended from bidding. An applicant who is suspended cannot however express an interest (bid) or receive any offer of accommodation. An applicant can be suspended for various reasons which include:

- Waiting for verification information
- Investigation of incomplete or inconsistent details on the application
- Awaiting proof of change of circumstances
- Applicants in supported accommodation who are not ready for move on
- Some applicants with rent arrears (see section 2 non qualification/suspension rule for current or former rent arrears for details of when an applicant will be allowed to qualify but suspended from bidding)
- Applicants considered not to have mental capacity
- Fraud investigations

#### **4.5: Suspension if the applicant is not capable of entering into a contract**

Where an applicant who has qualified to join the Housing Register is assessed as lacking the mental capacity to understand the contractual responsibilities of a tenancy they will be suspended from being considered for any offer of accommodation. The Council cannot enter into a contractual agreement with applicants who are unable to understand the contract. Mental capacity can change

and if the applicant, following their suspension, is subsequently assessed as possessing sufficient mental capacity the suspension can be lifted.

Alternatively, if it is deemed an applicant does not have the capacity to understand a tenancy agreement the Council will consider whether to make an offer in the circumstances where the applicant's interests are vested in a Power of Attorney who has been appointed by the court of protection.

#### **4.6: Assessing whether a band should be awarded for any impact of an applicant's current housing on a medical condition or disability**

Priority banding may be given if qualifying applicants are suffering ill-health, which is aggravated by their housing conditions and which would be helped by a move elsewhere.

When assessing whether to award Band 1 or 2 or no priority, the council will follow the five-stage assessment set out below:

- a) Is the medical/disability issue serious enough for a priority banding to be considered?
- b) If the medical condition is serious enough for a priority banding to be considered the assessing officer should then decide if there is a direct link between the identified medical problem and the applicant's current housing accommodation/situation, i.e., on the facts obtained (from the applicant and any medical information or reports submitted including any advice from an independent medical advisor or occupational therapist) does the assessing officer accept that the applicant's current housing accommodation/circumstances are making their medical condition or disability substantially worse, or will make it worse?
- c) In practical terms, the officer will consider the adverse effect this has on the applicant's ability to manage day-to-day tasks in their current home. The applicant's current housing accommodation/circumstances may be impacting on their medical condition or disability but not to the extent that an award of Band 1 or 2 priority should be granted under the criteria adopted for the Policy. There are examples listed in appendix 2 for when an award of Band 1 or 2 may be awarded, and they are used to guide the officer when making their decision.
- d) Before making an award, the assessing officer needs to be satisfied there is a realistic expectation that the impact on the identified medical condition/disability would be removed or significantly improved through the provision of alternative accommodation.
- e) If the officer is satisfied that the impact on the identified medical condition/disability would be removed or significantly improved, they would then decide whether to award Band 1 or 2 depending on the severity of the impact. The assessing officer will make their final decision based on a medical adviser's recommendations and the medical adviser will be guided by this five-stage assessment process.

#### **4.7: When medical priority will not normally be awarded**

Medical priority will not normally be awarded in the following circumstances:

- a) where the applicant has a health issue, however severe, that is not impacted by the accommodation occupied
- b) health problems that are not affected by housing or cannot be improved by moving
- c) where a move would only make a marginal improvement to the applicant's condition
- d) medical impacts caused by housing defects that are likely to be rectified in a reasonable time frame
- e) where another reasonable course of action is available to the applicant to resolve their difficulties
- f) time-related medical problems (e.g., pregnancy-related problems or a broken leg)
- g) Disrepair problems not impacting significantly on the applicant's medical condition. (Note: under the Policy an applicant may receive priority separately for living in unfit or unsatisfactory housing depending on the assessment made of their circumstances and impact)
- h) overcrowding not impacting significantly on the applicant's medical condition. (Note: under the Policy an applicant may receive priority separately for being overcrowded)
- i) if the situation can be resolved by equipment or minor adaptations which can be implemented in a reasonable period of time.

Medical assessments are not just related to banding. The council will also consider recommendations for future housing, for example regarding the floor level a household may need and whether an extra bedroom is required due to a child having autism. Guidelines for assessing extra bedroom requests for ADHD, Austistic spectrum, sensory processing difficulties, and other mental or physical health problems are set out in appendix 2.

An applicant or member of their household who considers themselves to have a disability will only be given housing priority banding (based on the disability), if the property is assessed as no longer suitable for their needs. If the assessment indicates that a move to a different type of property would be more beneficial to the household's health and wellbeing, then priority will be awarded. For example, an applicant with a disability who finds it difficult to walk up steps would be awarded priority if their current property had stairs (and no adaptation to help), they would not be awarded any priority if their current housing was level access or contained adaptations to make the property suitable. Again examples are given at appendix 2 for when an award may be made due to the impact of current housing circumstances on a person's disability.

#### **4.8: Need for an Adapted Property**

An applicant with an assessed need for specific adaptations will not normally be offered a property where these adaptations are not already fitted, this excludes minor adaptations such as handrails. Exceptions to this can be considered only after a full

assessment has been carried out by the Occupational Therapists, and this includes options for adapting the applicant's current property.

#### **4.9: Specialist accommodation for older persons in Stevenage**

Older people housing will normally only be allocated to applicants who are aged 60 or over (for couples, where at least one partner is aged 60 or over). All applicants will be subject to a needs and risk assessment.

In exceptional circumstances we may consider allocating specialist accommodation for older people to applicants under 60 if the applicant can demonstrate that they have a diagnosed illness or disability that means they would benefit from older people housing (receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment is not in itself evidence of this). We will also consider allocating 1st floor and above un-lifted one-bedroom properties in dispersed specialist accommodation for older people to applicants who are aged 55 and over.

In all cases a needs and risk assessment will be carried out to assess that the applicant:

- a) is suited to live in specialist accommodation for older people; and
- b) would benefit from specialist accommodation for older people.

Applicants without a local connection to Stevenage but who have an identified need for specialist accommodation for older people following an assessment, will be considered for lower demand specialist accommodation for older people properties only.

#### **4.10: The Role of the Housing Panel**

Most decisions about applications, priority and allocation of a home will be made by the assessing officer or the manager where a decision clearly comes within the policy rules. However, there will be a small number of decisions where a case will be referred to the Housing Panel due to the complexity of the decision to be made.

The Housing Panel is made up of a group of senior housing managers from the council who meet regularly to discuss specific housing allocations cases. The Housing Portfolio Holder or their representative can attend meetings and observe the panel's discussions.

Under its remit the Panel may consider:

- a) decisions on whether to award Band 1 for medical, welfare or exceptional circumstances where the manager for the applications and allocations function is of the view that the case is not straightforward and would benefit from being considered by the Panel.
- b) complicated cases where on the facts and circumstances a decision is needed as to whether to exercise discretion, for example should discretion be applied where an applicant does not meet a qualification rule but has made a case for discretion to be applied and the facts presented are not straightforward.
- c) a case that falls outside the rules of this allocations Policy

#### **4.11: Statutory successions**

Tenancies created prior to 1 April 2012:

Under the terms of the Housing Act 1985, where no succession to a tenancy has already taken place, specified family members may succeed to a secure tenancy on the death of the tenant, if certain conditions are met. This is known as a statutory succession. Where the successor tenant is the spouse, partner or civil partner of the tenant they will not be required to move even if under-occupying. If the statutory successor tenant will be under-occupying the property, they will be required to move to a property that is suited to their needs under the terms of this allocations Policy. The right of succession is to the tenancy, not the property.

Tenancies created from 1 April 2012:

The Localism Act 2011 introduced changes to the law on succession rights. For tenancies created from 1st April 2012, the statutory right to succeed to a tenancy rests only with a spouse, partner or civil partner of the tenant, who was residing with the tenant as their only or principal home at the time of the tenant's death. Other family members will not have a statutory right to succeed to a tenancy.

#### **4.12: Discretionary successions**

Where a statutory succession to a tenancy has already taken place, or for a post April 2012 tenancy where there is no spouse, partner or civil partner eligible to succeed to the tenancy, the council will consider a request to succeed to the tenancy from certain family members or live-in carers who were resident with the tenant at the time of the death of the tenant. They must be eligible to join the Housing Register and qualify for an offer of accommodation in their own right and satisfy certain other conditions as set out in the council's succession policy. This is known as a discretionary succession. The council's policy on discretionary succession may change from time to time and more information is available on the council's website [www.stevenage.gov.uk](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk).

In every case where the council has agreed a discretionary succession and there is under-occupation of the existing property, the discretionary successor will be required to move to a property that is suited to their needs under the terms of this Allocations Policy. They will still be allowed to bid under the Choice Based Lettings but a direct offer is more likely to be made and can be made at any time. The chance to bid for a property will be limited because of the legal rules that require the Council to serve a notice requiring them to move six months of the tenant's death but before 12 months in order for the notice to be considered valid.

Only one offer arising out of a successful bid or one direct offer will be made and if this is refused, the council will consider that the discretion is no longer justified and the discretionary successor will be required to leave the property and make their own arrangements for their future housing. The council will take legal action to recover possession of the property in occupation by the discretionary successor if they refuse to leave the property.

#### **4.13: Local Lettings Policies**

Local lettings initiatives may be applied to meet the particular needs of a local ward or area or to address sustainability and community issues to ensure that the housing allocation Policy is able to contribute to building sustainable communities. Note all new developments may be subject to a local lettings plan.

Local Lettings Plans will be tailored to fit local situations in well-defined communities. Each local lettings policy will be based on a detailed analysis of relevant information gathered from a variety of sources and may include, for example, evidence from internal departments, partner Housing Associations, local Councillors, and the community itself. (Evidence may include information such as tenant profiling, the incidence of anti-social behaviour, and stock turnover in a particular block, street or area, a neighbourhood plan or the need to provide housing for local people in rural villages and parishes).

See appendix 4 for full details of how local lettings policies will be agreed and applied.

#### **4.14: Assessing overcrowding and the bedroom size that can be allocated**

For the purpose of assessing a person's housing need for overcrowding and for the purpose of deciding the number of bedrooms to be allocated to a household for rehousing the following criteria will be used:

1 bedroom will be allowed for:

- One bedroom for applicant and partner/spouse (if any)
- One bedroom for any additional adult couple
- One bedroom for any two additional people of the same sex (up to the age of 18)
- One bedroom for any two additional people of the opposite sex under age 10
- One bedroom for any additional person (aged 18 or over)

Notes on how the Council will apply the above criteria:

- a) Children are not considered as part of the household of the applicant if the children have a main permanent residence elsewhere. If shared custody, refer to point 3.3.
- b) Families headed by a single parent will be treated in the same way as a family headed by a couple.
- c) Couples should always have their own bedrooms and not share with children.
- d) Couples can be treated as needing two bedrooms only if there is an exceptional medical need and the Council's medical assessment agrees with this need.
- e) When assessing the level of overcrowding where an applicant or a member of their household who is part of the application are sleeping in a room that is not a bedroom they will not be counted as having a bedroom.
- f) For measuring overcrowding and the size of the home that can be allocated the Council will include students who are away on a temporary basis i.e. at university or college).
- g) Non-dependent children will only be considered as a member of the household if they have been living with the applicant as their permanent full-time residence for



a period of over 12 months. This may be waived for non-dependents who give or receive care from the applicant.

- h) Other non-dependents who are not children of the applicant and have lived with the applicants for more than 12 months will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- i) Commercial lodgers are never considered as non-dependents. (In this context commercial lodgers are non-family members who are receiving board and/or lodgings in return for payment, or payment in kind).
- j) Any property with 2 reception rooms will have one counted as a bedroom
- k) An extra bedroom may be awarded where there is a severely disabled adult or child who the Council agree, based on the facts assessed, needs their own room (see appendix 2 for more details as to how a claim for an extra bedroom will be assessed).
- l) Carers who provide regular overnight care may be granted a bedroom based on the assessment of the facts of each case. The fact that there is overnight care will not necessarily mean an extra bedroom will be allowed. The decision will be based on the facts of the case including:
  - the number of days overnight care is provided.
  - whether there is a requirement for the carer to remain awake and
  - what other facilities are available in the home.

The number of bedrooms needed by an applicant depends upon the size of their family. The table shows the number of bedrooms that we consider an applicant needs based on household size

Size of family	Size of property
Single person over the age of 18	Studio / single person home with single bedroom
A couple without children	1 bedroom
A couple with one child of any age, including an adult child	2 bedrooms
A couple with two children of the same sex up to the age of 18	2 bedrooms
Two adults of opposite sex who do not live as a couple, for example a brother and sister	2 bedrooms
A couple with two children of the opposite sex and both under 10	2 bedrooms
A couple with two children of the opposite sex, one of whom is aged 10 or over	3 bedrooms
A couple with three children	3 bedrooms
A couple with four children (all of the same sex or two of each sex)	3 bedrooms
A couple with two children of the opposite sex aged under 10, and one dependent relative (for example, widowed mother)	3 bedrooms
A couple with four children (three of one sex and one of the opposite sex)	4 bedrooms
A couple with more than four children	4 bedrooms

Note:

- a) A couple or single parent expecting a baby is entitled to one bedroom. Unborn babies are not considered when determining the number of bedrooms needed
- b) Single people without children may be offered a studio
- c) Single bedrooms will be used for one person not sharing (for example a single parent)
- d) Double bedrooms will be used for two people sharing (for example two children sharing)
- e) Council tenants under occupying in their current properties from properties with three or more bedrooms will be allowed, if they wish, to be considered for properties with one bedroom more than they need.
- f) An applicant should note that for Private Registered Provider properties, the Housing Association may have adopted different criteria for determining the number of bedrooms a household requires.
- g) 3 bedroom or more need families who are willing can choose to be considered for smaller council owned properties that are up to one bedroom size less than their assessed need as long as this does not mean that they will be statutorily overcrowded. For 3 bedroom properties this is limited to families with more than one child under the age of 5 who have been assessed as having a 3 bedroom need but opt to be considered for a 2 bedroom property. For 4 or 5 bedroom properties this is limited to families with more than 4 children.

#### **4.15: Data protection**

Stevenage Borough Council will ensure personal information of all applicants (new, existing, and deleted) is:

- a) stored lawfully.
- b) processed in a fair and transparent manner.
- c) collected for a specific, explicit and legitimate purpose.
- d) kept up to date and held until it is no longer required; and
- e) shared only with other organisations for legitimate processing.

The Council's privacy notice, which sets out when and why we collect personal information about people who access its services, how we use it, how we keep it secure, and individuals' rights, can be found on our website:

<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/about-the-council/access-to-information/privacy-notices/privacy-policy>

The UK-GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 provide individuals with a right to request access to any of their personal data held by the Council and a right to know where the data came from, how it is used, and why it is held. Such a request is called a "subject access request" and applies to personal data in housing files. Information about making a subject access request is available on our website:

[https://myaccount.stevenage.gov.uk/service/Subject\\_Access\\_Request](https://myaccount.stevenage.gov.uk/service/Subject_Access_Request)

Applicants must state their name and provide proof of their identity, such as a copy of a passport, driving license, or recent utility bill. The Council will not usually charge a fee to deal with a subject access request.

Once hawse have received the information and proof of ID, we must provide the requested information within one month. There is a limited range of exemptions from the right of subject access.

#### **4.16: Right to information**

Anyone has the right to request access to recorded information held by the council under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Requests under the FOIA must be made in writing and details of how to request information can be found on the Council's website:

<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/about-the-council/access-to-information/freedom-of-information/freedom-of-information-act>

Once a valid request has been reviewed the council must usually respond within 20 working days.

Requests made by individuals for their own personal data will be treated as "subject access requests" under the UK-GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 (see section above for information).

#### **4.17: Equality, accessibility, and monitoring**

Stevenage Borough Council is committed to ensuring that the Policy, and the implementation of all associated guidance and procedures, are non-discriminatory, taking into account the needs of groups protected by the Equality Act 2010, the Human Rights Act 1998, and for children, Section 11 of the Children Act.

To help the council identify the needs of applicants, the application form contains specific questions relating to vulnerability, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, and other relevant criteria. The information obtained will be used to monitor the impact of the Policy to enable a better understanding of people's housing needs and ensure no one is discriminated against as a result of the way this Policy has been framed or during the administration of it.

Under the Equality Act 2010, and in particular Section 149 of the Public Sector Equality Duty, a council is required to give due regard to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, when exercising a public function such as implementing their legal 'Housing Allocation Policy'.

The Council will ensure this Policy complies with current equality legislation. It will be subject to a full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) before it is adopted. The EIA will be regularly reviewed as information regarding the impact of the Policy is obtained. A copy can be requested directly from the council.

#### **4.18: Complaints**

Complaints are separate to the circumstances in which an applicant is entitled to seek a review of a decision made on their housing application. A request for a review

of a decision made on an application should be made under the review procedure (set out in the section below) and not through the council's complaints process.

Where an applicant wishes to make a complaint about poor service, or the way they have been treated, this should be made under the Council's two stage complaints policy. Information about how to make a complaint and how the Council will deal with it can be found at

<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/have-your-say/compliments-and-complaints>

Where a complaint relates to how an applicant has been dealt with under this Policy an applicant has the right to continue with their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman Service if they are unhappy with the response to their complaint.

The Local Government Ombudsman is an independent service run by Central Government to make sure that Councils provide the required standard of service to their customers.

The Ombudsman can investigate complaints about how the Council has done something, but they cannot question what has been done simply because someone did not agree with it.

Website: [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

#### **4.19: When an applicant has a right to request a statutory review**

Under the housing legislation an applicant has a legal right to request a review of any of the following decisions reached by the council:

- a) a decision that an applicant is ineligible, or not a qualifying person to join the Housing Register
- b) a decision regarding which band an applicant has been awarded
- c) the priority date granted for the band awarded
- d) to remove an applicant from the Housing Register
- e) any decision about the facts of the case that has been used to assess their application including the decision the council has made regarding who can be included in the application
- f) where an applicant considers that a decision has been reached based on incorrect information.

#### **4.20: How a request for a review will be dealt with**

Applicants who are unhappy with a decision (listed above) made under the Allocation Policy should in the first instance contact the Lettings Team and explain why they think the decision is not correct or not reasonable. An initial informal review will then be undertaken by either the housing officer who dealt with their case or an equivalent officer.

The applicant will be notified whether the decision still stands and the reasons for this usually within 10 working days in writing.

If an applicant wishes to take the matter further, they can make a request for a formal review of the decision which must be made within 21 days of receiving the decision. The request should be made in writing by letter or email. In these cases, the applicant will then be invited to make a written submission stating the reasons for their request for a review. Formal reviews will be conducted by a manager senior to the officer that made the decision and who was not involved in the original decision making process. The applicant will be notified of the outcome of the review in writing, including the reasons for their decision. The council aims to notify the applicant within 56 days; however, this is a target timescale and may be longer depending on operational pressures.

There is no right to request a review of a review decision.

#### **4.21: Monitoring and reviewing the Allocations Policy**

This Allocations Policy will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it meets its stated objectives, complies with existing and proposed legislation and guidance, and does not operate in a manner that disadvantages, or discriminates against, any particular group.

The Allocations Policy will be monitored for any unintended consequences over the first twelve months of operation.

#### **4.22: Applicants owed a homeless duty and quotas**

In order to reduce the financial impact on the Council for homeless households occupying temporary accommodation, and to ensure that the Council is able to meet its legal duty to provide suitable temporary accommodation at all times, the council will target a proportion of properties for direct allocation to applicants owed a homeless duty. This will be set at the start of each financial year and may change during the year according to demand pressures.

The Council may wish to apply quotas for other groups and information about the quota level set for the homeless and any other groups will be detailed on the Council's website.

#### **4.23: Contacting the council**

You can contact Stevenage Borough Council to ask about any aspect of this policy or your application: By email: [lettings@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:lettings@stevenage.gov.uk)

Or by writing to:

Lettings

Stevenage Borough Council  
Daneshill House, Danestrete,  
Stevenage Herts

SG1 1HN

By telephoning: 01438 242242

## Section 5: How an applicant's housing needs and circumstances are assessed

### 5.0: The Banding system that has been adopted by the Council

The demand for social housing exceeds supply in Stevenage and therefore this policy prioritises the housing of applicants assessed as being in the greatest need. Once registered many applicants will still unfortunately, not have sufficient housing need to be offered a property.

The banding system set out in this section will normally be used to decide when to make an offer of accommodation and to whom.

The council has chosen to adopt a simple and transparent system creating 3 bands' where people will normally be ranked by date order in each queue as long as they qualify to join the housing register. The housing bands are summarised below, and full details are then set out.

**Band 1 – Urgent priority statutory housing need to move:** these are applicants that are owed a statutory award of 'reasonable preference' but whom the Council also believes should also be awarded 'additional preference' based on their very urgent housing need.

#### **Band 2 – High priority statutory housing need to move:**

This band consists of applicants that are owed a statutory award of 'reasonable preference' under the policy and have been awarded band 2 priority based on their assessed high housing need.

#### **Band 3 – Lower priority statutory housing need to move:**

This band consists of applicants with a statutory need but that need is assessed as being lower than Band 2, plus applicants over the age of 60 without a statutory housing need but are willing to consider accepting a tenancy for specialist accommodation for older people in Stevenage.

### 5.1: The date a band will be allocated

The band start date is the date the assessment of the applicant's Housing Register application has been received. If following being banded, an applicant's housing need and/or circumstances change and a reassessment results in the applicant being placed in a higher band their date for the higher band will be the date they were awarded that band for that higher assessed housing need.

Note: for eligible homeless applicants who meet the qualification rules to join the Housing Register the following will apply about their band start date:

- a) owed a Section 195(2) Prevention of homelessness duty – Band date is the date the duty was owed and not the date of the homelessness application.
- b) owed a Section 189B (2) Relief of homelessness duty – If an applicant has not been owed a prevention duty then the band date is the date the relief duty is owed and not the date of the homelessness application. If the applicant was owed a prevention duty which ended because they became homeless and they are then owed a relief duty, the effective date is the date the prevention duty was owed.
- c) owed the Main Section 193(2) duty – Band date is the date the Relief of homelessness duty was owed and not the date the Main duty was owed. This is because to start the date at the date the Main duty was owed would disadvantage an applicant by 56 days who has been found to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless.
- d) circumstances where the relief duty has ended, and the applicant is assessed at this point as not being in priority need - Band date is the date the Relief of homelessness duty is owed (or the date the prevention duty was owed if the applicant had been owed a prevention duty before being owed the relief duty) and not the date that the Relief duty is brought to an end.
- e) circumstances where the relief duty has ended, and the applicant is assessed at that point as not being owed a main duty due to being intentionally homeless - Band date is the date the Relief of homelessness duty is owed (or the date the prevention duty was owed if the applicant had been owed a prevention duty before being owed the relief duty) and not the date that the Relief duty is brought to an end.
- f) where the applicant becomes homeless unintentionally within 2 years of accepting a private rented sector offer, offered to bring the main Section 193 homelessness duty to an end, the effective date will be the date of the new application.

## 5.2: The Banding System

The following section provides details for how the policy defines and assesses housing need for an award of a band is described below. Where there are further details, beyond the details set out below for how the housing need criteria will be assessed, these are set out in appendices.

It is important to note that applicants will be placed in the appropriate band following an assessment that their housing need meets the threshold for that band. An applicant who qualifies under more than one of the housing need criteria will be awarded the highest priority they are entitled to under the criteria. They will not be awarded a higher band just because they meet more than one housing need criteria. For example, an applicant who meets 2 housing need criteria for Band 2 will still only be awarded band 2 and not Band 1.

### **BAND 1: Exceptionally Urgent Need to Move**

These are applicants awarded reasonable preference and additional preference and include households with the highest need for rehousing.

*Note: To be awarded any of the bands an applicant must qualify to be included on the Housing Register. This means they must meet the residential connection rule and not be disqualified under any of the other adopted rules, unless the council has agreed that discretion should be applied to waive the residential connection rule or any other qualification rule due to exceptional circumstances.*

#### **1: Emergency medical or disability need:**

A Band 1 award is for applicants who are suffering sudden or severe progressive life-threatening medical conditions or disability and need an immediate move (e.g., to facilitate hospital discharge) because their current home is unsuitable (as it does not meet their medical needs and/or cannot be adapted) and poses an immediate and serious danger to the individual.

See appendix 2 for more details on when a Band 1 award may be granted with examples of a Band 1 award.



**2:  
Exceptionally  
urgent need to  
move**

These decisions may be made by the manager for the applications and allocations service or made by the Housing Panel where it is considered that a case is extremely complicated and would benefit from being scrutinised by the Panel.

In the interests of fairness to all these applicants these circumstances are kept to a minimum. Examples of exceptional circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- a severe threat to life by others
- emergency cases whose homes are damaged by fire, flood, or other disaster may be provided with another tenancy if it is not possible to repair the existing home, or if any work to repair is to take such a long period of time that there will be serious disruption to family life
- households which, on police advice, must be moved immediately due to serious threats to one or more members of the household, or whose continuing occupation would pose a threat to the community
- cases nominated under the Police Witness Protection Policy or other similar Policies that the council has agreed to be part of
- an applicant who has an exceptional need that is not covered in the Allocation Policy. For example, where child or public protection issues require rehousing or for domestic abuse where all other options to remain in the home have been considered
- other exceptional circumstances as authorised by the Head of the Housing Service or equivalent.

For any Private Registered Provider tenant, the expectation is that, where it is safe to do so, a like for like management transfer would be granted, or an emergency decant provided whilst a suitable transfer can be arranged and therefore the majority of these cases should not need to be awarded a banding by the Council.

<p><b>3: Exceptional impact of an unfit private sector property</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private sector tenants and residents of dwellings where the council's Environmental Health team has determined the property poses a Category 1 hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (e.g. crowding and space, excessive cold or risk of falls) and</li> <li>• Following assessment, the applicants property is subject to a prohibition order, emergency action, demolition order or clearance under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System of the Housing Act 2004, and</li> <li>• The council is satisfied that the problem cannot be resolved by the landlord within six months and as a result continuing to occupy the accommodation will pose a considerable risk to the applicant's health. This includes a property that has severe damp, major structural defects including subsidence, flooding, collapse of roof, or living conditions that are a statutory nuisance, and there is no prospect of the problems being remedied within a six-month time period.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4: Applicants without access at all to any of the following facilities:</b></p>	<p>An applicant who has accommodation (not rough sleepers) with no access to the following within their current property:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) A bath or shower</li> <li>b) A toilet</li> <li>c) Running hot water supplies</li> <li>d) Electric/gas needed for essential activities</li> </ol> <p>Applicants who have access to shared facilities re cooking; bathroom and toilet will not qualify under these criteria.</p>
<p><b>5: Statutory overcrowding or severe overcrowding by 3 bedrooms or more as defined by the bedroom standard</b></p>	<p>The measurement of overcrowding is set out in section 4 of the policy.</p>
<p><b>6: Freeing up a social housing home that has been already significantly adapted</b></p>	<p>Where a tenant is living in a substantially adapted property and does not need the adaptations in their home they will be awarded band 1 in order to release the adapted home if the adaptations are assessed as being needed by an applicant listed as being in urgent need of the adaptations in the applicant's property</p>

<p><b>7: Armed Forces who meet the following criteria</b></p>	<p>Applicants with urgent housing need and have access to no other accommodation who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Are serving (and will soon leave) the regular forces and are suffering from serious injury, illness, mental ill health, or disability which is attributable to the person's service</li> <li>b) Has recently ceased, or will cease to be entitled, to reside in accommodation provided by the MOD following the death of that person's spouse or civil partner who has served in the regular forces and whose death was attributable (wholly or partly) to that service or</li> <li>c) Is serving or has served in the reserve forces and is suffering from a serious injury, illness or disability which is attributable (wholly or partly) to the person's service</li> </ul> <p>For this purpose "the regular forces" and "the reserve forces" have the meanings given by section 374 of the Armed Forces Act 2006.</p>
<p><b>8: Care Leavers</b></p>	<p>A care leaver who meets the criteria is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a care leaver who does not originate from Stevenage but has been placed into foster care or residential care in Stevenage and has been resident in Stevenage for five continuous years and meets the requirements for housing under the Leaving Care Act 2000 as being an eligible, relevant or former relevant person aged 18-21 (24 if in full time education).</li> </ul>

**BAND 2 – High Priority, Statutory Housing Need to Move:**

These are applicants that are owed a statutory award of ‘reasonable preference’ under the policy and have been awarded Band 2 priority based on their assessed high housing need.

*Note: To be awarded any of the bands an applicant must qualify to be included on the Housing Register. This means they must meet the residential connection rule and not be disqualified under any of the other adopted rules, unless the council has agreed that discretion should be applied to waive the residential connection rule or any other qualification rule due to exceptional circumstances.*

**1: Homeless applicants who are owed one of the following duties by Stevenage Council only**

- the Main Housing Duty under Section 193 of the Housing Act 1996, or
- a relief duty under Section 189B (2) where the applicant is, at the point of that 189B duty being accepted, considered likely to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless, whether a decision to that effect has been made or not, and the applicant is accommodated in interim temporary accommodation.

**2: Severe medical or disability impact:**

- Where an applicant (or a member of their household) is living in accommodation with a severe, long term, medical conditions (chronic or progressive) or severe disability that means they urgently need to move because their home is assessed as being highly unsuitable and is directly detrimental to the applicants’ physical or mental health.
- Where an applicant’s (or a member of their household) housing is unsuitable because of severe medical reasons or because of their disability. The applicant (or member of their household) is not housebound, but their current housing is exacerbating their health conditions.

See appendix 2 for examples of when a Band 2 award may be granted for severe medical or disability impact.

<p><b>3: Existing Stevenage Council tenants who:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• will move into a smaller property releasing a high demand property</li> <li>• occupy a house and wish to move to a general needs flat</li> <li>• occupy a two-bedroom bungalow or elderly persons flat and wish to move to a one bedroomed bungalows or into specialist accommodation for older persons</li> </ul> <p>Note the Council will assess whether a property that could be released is a high demand property and if so whether to award Band 1.</p>
<p><b>4: Existing Stevenage Council tenants who:</b></p>	<p>a) Has succeeded to the tenancy of a property which was specially built or substantially adapted for a person with a disability and they do not need this accommodation (see the succession policy for further information).</p> <p>b) Has an identified need for adaptations to their current property and there is another property with these adaptations already fitted. This will only apply when the applicant has been assessed by an Occupational Therapist and excludes minor adaptations i.e. grab rail.</p> <p><i>Note: many of these moves will be achieved through the Council initiating a management transfer and where this action is taken the transfer will not be carried out under this allocation policy.</i></p>
<p><b>5: Overcrowded by 2 bedrooms as defined by the bedroom standard set out in this policy</b></p>	<p>This group is defined as applicants overcrowded by 2 bedrooms who are living in the Stevenage area as defined under this Policy's overcrowding standard.</p>
<p><b>6: Succession to a tenancy</b></p>	<p>The applicant is a statutory or discretionary successor to a tenancy and is required to move to a smaller property. Note successors who are downsizing or are required to move to a smaller property will not be allowed one more bedroom than their housing need (as per the previous policy before this revised 2024 policy).</p>

<p><b>7: Unsatisfactory housing conditions or fitness</b></p>	<p>Private sector tenants that Stevenage Borough Council has determined that the property poses a serious category 1 hazard under the Health and Safety fitness rating and the Council's assessing officer is satisfied that the problem cannot be resolved by the landlord within 6 months and as a result continuing to occupy the accommodation will pose a considerable risk to the applicant's health. This includes a property that has severe damp, major structural defects including subsidence, flooding, collapse of roof, or have living conditions which are a statutory nuisance, and there is no prospect of the problems being remedied within a 6 month time period, and the household are not able to resolve their own housing problem by moving to alternative private sector accommodation.</p>
<p><b>8: Ready to move on from Council accredited supported housing scheme</b>  (except for the Haven YMCA and Housing First – See Band 3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An applicant is in a Council accredited supported housing in the Stevenage area, and</li> <li>• Is ready to move to independent settled housing on the recommendation of the support worker or equivalent; and</li> <li>• The applicant is in need of medium to long term rather than short term ongoing tenancy support; and</li> <li>• That support package has been assessed and is in place.</li> </ul>

**Band 3 – Lower Priority, Statutory Housing Need to Move:**

*Note: To be awarded any of the bands an applicant must qualify to be included on the Housing Register. This means they must meet the residential connection rule and not be disqualified under any of the other adopted rules, unless the council has agreed that discretion should be applied to waive the residential connection rule or any other qualification rule due to exceptional circumstances.*

**1: Applicants owed one of the following homelessness duties**

Applicants owed any of the following homelessness duties by Stevenage Council as set out below:

- a) Applicants where the Section 189(B) Relief duty has been brought to an end and an applicant has been assessed at that point as being intentionally homeless (and hasn't been disqualified under the unacceptable behaviour disqualification rule).
- b) Applicants owed the Section 193 C (4) Main duty where the Prevention or Relief duty was ended by the council due to their deliberate non-cooperation.
- c) Applicants owed a Section 189B (2) Relief duty by the Council and not considered likely to be in priority need.
- d) Applicants owed a Section 195 (2) Prevention of homelessness duty by the Council and not considered likely to be in priority need.
- e) Applicants where the Section 189(B) Relief of homelessness duty has been brought to an end and the applicant is determined to be homeless but not in priority need and therefore not owed a Main Homeless Duty.

**2: Insecurity that risks homelessness**

*Note: Applicants in this category will be boosted to Band 2 after 6 months in Band 3. Their effective date for Band 2 will be the date they are boosted to Band 2 and not the date they were awarded Band 3*

A pregnant applicant or applicant with a child or children who are sharing a home with family who are not part of their household and where:

- a) They have no ownership or tenancy rights, and the arrangement is short term and very insecure and only available whilst the applicant is actively seeking an offer of social housing or alternative accommodation with friends or in the private rented sector, and
- b) They were owed a prevention of homelessness duty as they were assessed as likely to become homeless within 56 days, and that duty has ended because they have been allowed to remain at home whilst they bid for social housing with their Band 2 priority and it is likely that they can remain for at least a year, and

	b) c) The family member with the interest in the home has agreed to allow the applicant to remain for at least a year.
<b>3: Applicants over 60 who have been assessed for specialist accommodation for older persons only</b>	Single applicant or couples aged 60 or over and with no other priority. The applicant wishes to move to specialist accommodation for older persons and has been assessed as suitable by Stevenage Borough Council.
<b>4: Overcrowded by 1 bedroom as defined by the bedroom standard set out in this policy</b>	This group is defined as applicants overcrowded by 1 bedroom who are living in the Stevenage area as defined under this Policy's overcrowding standard.
<b>5: Applicants who satisfy the 'Right to Move' criteria</b>	These are applicants who meet the Allocation of Housing (Qualification Criteria for Right to Move) Regulations 2015. This banding award applies to existing social tenants who seek to move from another council in England, and who have a need to move for work related reasons to avoid hardship. However, under this Allocation Policy, Stevenage Council will limit these moves to no more than 1% of all lettings per year. See <a href="#">annex 3</a> for details of how the 'Right to Move' criteria will be applied.



<p><b>6: Former Regular Armed Forces Applicants</b></p>	<p><i>Note armed forces that meet the legal requirement for additional preference will be awarded Band 1.</i></p> <p>Members of the Armed Forces persons who meet the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) They are serving in the regular forces and will be discharged within 6 months and have served for 5 years or more, or</li> <li>b) They were serving in the regular forces in the last 5 years and have applied to join the housing register within that 5-year period, and</li> <li>c) Had been previously living in the Stevenage area immediately before joining the armed forces or since leaving</li> </ul> <p>And d and e below must also apply</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>d) They did not leave the armed forces as a result of a dishonorable discharge, and</li> <li>e) They do not own or have a legal interest in any other property</li> </ul> <p>For this purpose "the regular forces" and "the reserve forces" have the meanings given by section 374 of the Armed Forces Act 2006.</p>
<p><b>7: Overcrowded by 1 bedroom as defined by the bedroom standard set out in this policy</b></p>	<p>This group is defined as applicants overcrowded by 1 bedrooms who are living in the Stevenage area as defined under this Policy's overcrowding standard.</p>
<p><b>8: Specific supported housing schemes subject to an annual quota</b></p>	<p>Haven YMCA supported housing scheme</p> <p>Housing First schemes</p> <p><i>These schemes are subject to an annual quota and will be let through direct lets.</i></p> <p><i>Outside of quota residents are still able to bid for appropriate accommodation.</i></p>

### 5.3: Advertising Properties

The council operates a choice based lettings (CBL) Policy called Housing Online for available council-owned properties and nominations to available properties owned by

registered provider landlords. Available homes are advertised weekly on our website and applicants are invited to bid to become the new tenant of the home. Information on bidding and how to bid is also available online.

Adverts will clearly indicate any restrictions on bidding (e.g., where properties have been adapted and/or are specifically for people with disabilities) and will detail any particular criteria that apply (e.g., any affordability criteria).

Available properties will normally be advertised on a regular basis and applicants given a restricted timeframe to place a bid. The bidding rules and deadlines will be available to applicants. We will not accept any bids received after the deadline.

#### **5.4: The bidding and selection process**

Properties are advertised weekly when noticed is received. They are uploaded on a Thursday and bidding will close the following Wednesday on our Housing Online website.

An applicant may express an interest through bidding on any advertised property that meets their needs.

- Bids will only be registered if the applicant is on the housing register
- Applicants will not be contacted individually if their bid is unsuccessful, however the results of the bids will be advertised on a regular basis
- Applicants can express an interest on a maximum of 3 properties in any single bidding cycle
- Bids can be withdrawn at any time prior to the closing date
- When the applicant wishes to bid for more than one property they will be prompted to capture their preference in numerical order,
- Bids will be accepted from nominated representatives of the applicant. To make a bid on behalf of an applicant the representative will be required to give the Housing Application Reference Number, National Insurance Number and date of birth for the first applicant
- Bids received after the advertised closing date and time will not be accepted under any circumstances
- At the end of each lettings cycle the bids will be sorted in order of:
  - a) Meeting the lettings criteria as stated in the property advert
  - b) Date order from Bands 1 to 3. Where an applicant has bid for more than one property and is top of the short list for more than one property, they will be offered the property for which they first bid.
- Applicants are encouraged to check their Housing Online housing portal to ensure the bids they have placed are recorded and the order of priority reflects their preferences

Note: where applicants are being shortlisted for a 4-bedroom property and there are more than one household who have bid from the same band, any household with 3 or more children under 16 will be shortlisted before a smaller family. There will be exceptions if a child has an assessed disability. The reason for this policy is that the demand for 4-bedroom properties is far higher than the number that become available to let and families with younger children are more likely to require and larger property

for longer than a family with older children where it is more likely that 1 or more of those children will move out.

### **5.5: Offers of accommodation**

This section sets out the procedure that will apply to making an offer of accommodation once an applicant has been selected from a shortlist of successful applicants bidding for that property.

We will carry out verification checks on applicants who will be new tenants of the council. These checks are to ensure that all the information we hold relating to an application is up to date. Verification checks may be carried out as part of a pre-tenancy interview process or we may carry out a home visit prior. All applicants who will be new tenants of the council (including those housed outside choice based lettings, such as via an external mutual exchange) must attend a pre-tenancy interview before being offered the tenancy of a council home. Council tenants transferring will not normally be required to attend. Following the pre-tenancy interview, tenancy training will be offered to applicants where it is considered appropriate.

We will contact the successful applicant at their last notified address, email address or telephone number to complete verification check and then arrange pre-tenancy interview.

If the successful applicant does not respond to this contact within two working days or fails to attend an appointment for a pre-tenancy interview and verification check, their bid will be disregarded and the next shortlisted applicant will be contacted.

Following a successful verification check and pre-tenancy interview, the successful applicant will be offered the property. They will be invited to view the property when it is ready to let. At the viewing, they will be offered the tenancy of the property and invited to sign their tenancy agreement for the property. There may be times where a viewing would be prior to the letting but will be stated by the officer at the time of offer. If an applicant requests more time to make a decision, they will be asked to contact the lettings team with their decision by 9.30am on the next working day.

If the applicant refuses the offer of a tenancy or fails to contact the lettings team with their decision by 9.30am on the next working day, the next shortlisted applicant will be invited to view and accept an offer of the tenancy of the property, and so on until an offer is accepted.

From time to time it may be necessary to arrange multiple viewings of a property. In these circumstances, the decision on whether to accept a tenancy must be made at the viewing. The offer of a tenancy will be made to the top bidder present, if refused to the next ranked bidder and so on until the offer of a tenancy is accepted.

Where two or more bidders have the same effective date of application within a band, the council will give priority to the applicant with the earliest original date of application. The council will disregard the highest shortlisted bidder and invite the next shortlisted Bidder to view in the following circumstances:

- where priority is given to a particular group and the applicant is not in that group
- under the terms of this allocations scheme, the applicant does not meet the criteria for the property bid for
- the applicant failed to respond within two working days to a request to arrange pre-tenancy interview and verification check
- the applicant fails to attend an arranged viewing
- the applicant has pets and the property bid for is not suitable for certain pets
- the applicant is a tenant of the council or a registered provider and following their successful bid they are found to have committed anti-social behaviour or to have rent arrears, or their current property is found not to meet the leaving standard, or they have committed any other breach of tenancy conditions
- following their successful bid, an applicant is found to not qualify for the housing register
- since joining the Housing Register an applicant has become ineligible.
- on verification of the applicants' details, the priority band has been incorrectly awarded due to the information received by the applicant or due to mistakes in the assessment of the application itself.
- the applicants' circumstances have changed since the priority band was awarded and the applicant is no longer entitled to the same level of priority.
- the Council or the Housing Association landlord for the property being advertised has evidenced housing management reason not to offer the property to the person selected

As part of the pre offer verification checks applicants will be expected to provide evidence of their identify and the identity of anyone to be rehoused with them, as well as their current address before any tenancy can be agreed. A home visit may be required to confirm this.

If the visiting officer discovers the details are incorrect, no offer of accommodation may be made.

Applicants will only be offered one property at a time. Once an offer has been made to the applicant they will not be able to bid or be considered for other offers of accommodation until the current offer is refused.

As part of the offer we will provide details of the property and make arrangements to view it as quickly as possible. Applicants are expected to decide whether to accept or refuse the offer at the viewing and will also be offered the opportunity to sign for the tenancy at the viewing. If applicants do not inform the Council of their decision immediately or within 24 hours of the viewing the offer may be withdrawn and the property allocated to the next suitable bidder.

If an applicant does not reply to an invitation in writing, by letter or email, to view a property within 2 working days the offer will be deemed to have been refused and the property will be offered to the next applicant on the shortlist who qualifies for that offer. This will then count as one of the applicant's 2 reasonable offers unless a satisfactory explanation for the applicant's failure to respond is accepted by the Council.

Where the offer is to an applicant owed a statutory homeless duty a property will not be reoffered until the Council have been informed of the applicant's refusal or failure to attend the appointment to view and have made a decision whether or not to enforce the offer to end the homeless duty owed.

A suitable and reasonable offer of accommodation is defined in appendix 1 of the policy.

There may, unfortunately, be exceptional circumstances where, following a viewing or notification of offer an offer may still be withdrawn. This can be done up to the point before a tenancy is signed. Examples of reasons when a property offer may be withdrawn are:

- The property is not suitable for the households needs
- The property fails to become available
- The offer has been made in error
- The property is required for an emergency for another applicant or tenant
- It transpires that the rent would not be affordable

There must be clear grounds for refusing or bypassing applicants who are top of any shortlist and these will be recorded by the Council, or a partner Housing Association where the property advertised is owned by them.

#### **5.6: Acceptance of an offer made under CBL or a direct offer**

If an applicant accepts an offer of a council tenancy and the property is ready for letting they will be invited to sign for the tenancy and complete all necessary paperwork,.

Where the offer is of a joint tenancy, then both parties to the tenancy must attend the letting appointment to sign the paperwork. If only one party attends, the letting will not proceed and the offer of a tenancy will be withdrawn.

If an applicant is a tenant of the council or a local registered provider, they must give up vacant possession of their existing property and the keys must be returned to the council's customer service centre or to the registered provider, by an agreed date. The tenant will be liable for both rents once the tenancy agreement is signed until the keys have been returned.

When the tenancy agreement has been signed, the tenant's housing register application will be cancelled. A new housing register application must be completed if the tenant wishes to be considered for re-housing in the future and there is a new housing need.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: DEFINITION OF A SUITABLE OFFER

Where accommodation is offered an applicant will normally be expected to accept an offer of a property that meets their specified needs. Reasonable offers are those that are deemed as suitable and appropriate to meet the housing and medical needs of the household concerned and are affordable to the applicant and his or her household.

The suitability criteria used to determine whether an offer to end a main homeless duty owed under Section 193(2) of the Housing Act 1996) or a relief of homelessness duty owed under Section 189b, will be the criteria set down in the Suitability of Accommodation Order England 2012, as amended by Section 12 of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, relevant case law and statutory guidance.

These criteria only apply to an offer of social housing or private rented housing made with the intention of ending a full homeless duty. Where an offer is made to any other banded applicant who is not owed a full homeless duty it is for the council to decide on the facts of the case whether the offer is suitable using the guidance in this appendix to help the officer make the decision.

The council will consider that a property is suitable if all of the following criteria are met:

- it is located in an area that the council considers to be suitable for the applicant and their household. This could include accommodation located outside of the Stevenage area
- if it is affordable for the applicant and his or her household based on his or her financial circumstances at the time of offer
- it is sized in accordance with the criteria in this Policy
- it complies with any recommendation made by a medical or other relevant advisor

In determining the suitability of accommodation, the council will consider the following:

- a) the significance of any disruption to the employment, education or caring responsibilities of the applicant or a member of the household
- b) the accessibility of medical or other support facilities that are currently used by the applicant or a member of the household
- c) the accessibility of local services, including places of worship, amenities, and transport
- d) its duty to safeguard children under Section 11 Children Act 2004
- e) its public sector equality duty under Section 149 Equality Act 2010
- f) if a suitable property is located outside of the borough's boundary then the council has to take into consideration the distance from the applicant's existing accommodation in the borough

The above are matters for the council to determine based on the facts of the case.

## **Guidance for assessing officers on how the council will assess reasonable and unreasonable refusals:**

### **1) Property size**

The property must be the appropriate size for the household's needs at the time of making the offer. Where the family composition has changed, so that the property offered is too small or large for the applicant's needs, the refusal will be recorded as reasonable.

It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that they register any change in their circumstances that will affect the number of bedrooms to which they are entitled.

Where the applicant refuses a property because it is too small on grounds of the need for an additional or larger bedroom(s) due to medical/mobility factors, but it meets the lettings standard, this will normally be considered to be an unreasonable refusal unless the applicant provides new medical information at the offer stage that is accepted by the council.

### **2) Property type**

It will not be considered to be a reasonable refusal due to a dislike of the property type. Therefore, an applicant cannot reasonably refuse an offer because for example, it is in a tower block, it does not have a garden or a particular heating system, it is on a wrong floor, or does not have a lift. If the applicant states medical grounds for refusing the property, these should already have been disclosed and considered as part of the assessment of their application, unless new information is submitted that is accepted by the council.

Where specialist accommodation is offered to a household inappropriately, this is considered to be a reasonable refusal. This may be for example:

- a) offers of wheelchair standard housing to households which do not have wheelchair users
- b) offers made to disabled applicants which are unsuitable for their needs, for example where they are unable to open a door entry system because the doors are too heavy
- c) offers of specialist accommodation for older people housing where the applicant is not of the appropriate age

### **3) Property condition**

Where a property is refused on grounds of repair/decoration, this will be considered an unreasonable refusal unless the voids team decides to withdraw the property from letting for further works to be carried out.

### **4) Area of choice**

An offer will still be considered reasonable even if it is not within an applicant's area of choice.

### **5) Racial harassment**

Where an applicant from an ethnic minority household refuses the property prior to viewing because the previous tenant was rehoused as a result of racial harassment, or there is a known problem of racial harassment in the vicinity of the property, the refusal is considered reasonable.

### **6) Choice of landlord**

An applicant cannot choose whether they are rehoused by a specific Private Registered Provider. Therefore, any refusal for example by an applicant of a property because it is a Private Registered Provider property with no 'Right to Buy', or 'Right to Acquire', or the rent is higher than another social landlord will not be considered to be reasonable (unless in the example of the rent level the assessment is that the offer is unaffordable for the applicant in question).

### **7) Pets**

One of the conditions of the tenancy agreement is that a tenant must obtain the written consent of the landlord before keeping domestic pets.

Any intention to keep a pet must comply with the council or Private Registered Provider tenancy terms and conditions, which means that permission must be sought and agreed prior to signing the tenancy agreement for the property. Therefore, any refusal on the basis that permission has not been granted to keep a pet is not reasonable.



## APPENDIX 2: EXAMPLES OF WHEN AN APPLICANT MAY BE AWARDED PRIORITY BAND 1 OR 2 ON THE BASIS OF A MEDICAL OR DISABILITY NEED

### Examples of circumstances to help the assessing officer to decide when Band 1 (Emergency) may be awarded on medical or disability grounds

The following examples are intended to guide the assessing officer on the threshold set for a Band 1 award. They can also serve to help an applicant understand the threshold for a priority award to be granted. A Band 1 award is for “*Applicants who are **suffering sudden or severe progressive life-threatening** medical conditions and **need an immediate move** (e.g., to facilitate hospital discharge) because their current home is unsuitable (as it does not meet their medical needs and/or cannot be adapted) and **poses an immediate and serious danger** to the individual.*”

- a) where an applicant’s condition is expected to be terminal within a period of 12 months and rehousing is required to provide a basis for the provision of suitable care
- b) the condition is life threatening and the applicant’s existing accommodation is a major contributory factor
- c) the applicant has severe mobility issues, is housebound and is unable to leave their accommodation except with assistance that will result in high risk to themselves or their carer. They have an assessed need to move to accommodation that meets their needs
- d) the applicant is not ambulant and a wheelchair user who is unable to use their wheelchair within their current accommodation and has an assessed need to move to suitable accommodation
- e) the applicant’s accommodation is directly contributing to the deterioration of the applicant’s health such as severe chest condition requiring intermittent hospitalisation as a result of chronic dampness in the accommodation and the condition of the property cannot be resolved within a reasonable period of time – usually six months
- f) where overcrowding in the property leaves the applicant at risk of life-threatening infection
- g) Applicants who have a progressive, chronic or life-threatening medical condition and cannot be discharged from hospital because they do not have any accommodation, or their accommodation is unsuitable for example, because they cannot access toilet and/or bathing facilities in the property. This will include cases that cannot be discharged from hospital because their home is, and will remain, permanently entirely unsuitable or entirely inaccessible to live in
- h) Where the assessing officer accepts that the evidence from a relevant health professional indicates that there is a significant risk of serious and permanent injury and/or permanent disability

- i) Applicants who have a progressive, chronic or life-threatening medical condition as diagnosed by a healthcare professional and urgently need to move to accommodation with significant disabled adaptations, such as accommodation suitable for a wheelchair user
- j) A serious illness, where an applicant is receiving palliative care and urgently requires rehousing to facilitate the on-going provision of that care
- k) The applicant's health is so severely affected by the accommodation that it is likely to become life threatening, e.g., applicant has severe mental health problems that are significantly exacerbated by their accommodation and that opinion is fully evidenced by the applicant's consultant or mental health services
- l) Due to limited mobility a person is unable to access essential parts of the property e.g., bathroom/toilet and no adaptation is possible
- m) A member of the household is elderly or disabled or has a progressive illness and is likely to require admission to hospital or residential/nursing care in the immediate future and re-housing would enable the person to remain at home
- n) Where the applicant is prevented from having access to kidney dialysis, respiratory, or other similar essential equipment. This will normally apply where these circumstances are likely to prevent someone from remaining in their home for all or most of the time. Such a condition would be likely to be ongoing, rather than a temporary condition

**Examples of circumstances to help the assessing officer to decide when Band 2 should be awarded on medical or disability grounds**

- a) A life-threatening condition which is seriously affected by the current housing and where re-housing would make that condition significantly easier to manage
- b) A life limiting condition and their current accommodation is affecting their ability to retain independence or enable adequate care
- c) A new and life-changing condition that severely impairs their mobility, meaning they are unable to carry out day-to-day activities, or have difficulty accessing facilities inside and outside of their accommodation and require housing into suitable accommodation
- d) An applicant or member of his/her household usually has a chronic condition; examples might include a respiratory condition, severe asthma or emphysema – and that the condition is being made worse by the current accommodation
- e) Where their current property leaves a person at risk of infection, e.g., where an applicant is suffering from late-stage or advanced AIDs

- f) People who have a severe mental health or learning disability which significantly affects their ability to lead a normal life, and which puts them at risk of admission to hospital or residential care. Evidence would normally need to be provided from a specialist consultant psychiatrist or a certified paediatric nurse that their current accommodation is having a significant detrimental impact on the mental health of any member of the household
- g) People living in a mobile home, caravan or converted vehicle which, due to medical conditions, the vehicle cannot meet their essential needs
- h) Where remaining in the current accommodation poses a significant risk of serious and permanent injury and/or permanent severe disability
- i) Someone with a medical or disability who's housing has rendered them housebound
- j) Where a move would avoid the need for another service (e.g., Social Services) from having to provide a significant level of support. This might include for example residential care, overnight care provision, or other support with similar resource implications
- k) Where someone suffers with epilepsy or other conditions that cause frequent and unpredictable falls and all medical interventions to prevent them have been investigated. This will involve an assessment of the layout of their current accommodation, for example the number and nature of steps, stairs or other hazards that may increase the risk of serious injury
- l) The applicant or household member requires significant disabled adaptations to meet their needs and this is not possible in their current accommodation or would not be cost effective
- m) Armed forces personnel who need to move to suitable adapted accommodation because of a serious injury, medical condition or disability that he or she has sustained as a result of service
- n) Veterans who have actively served in the armed forces and are suffering from severe post-traumatic stress disorder or serious illness directly related to service in the forces
- o) An occupational therapist has identified that the current accommodation is partially suitable but:
  - the applicant or member of his/her household needs a major adaptation, such as a level access shower; or
  - the applicant or member of his/her household has significant difficulty managing stairs or difficulty accessing the property owing to stairs or slopes leading to doorways and the occupational therapist recommends a lift, ramped access or ground floor living; and
- p) Applicants who have significant mobility issues and would benefit from a move to ground floor or level access accommodation

- q) Applicants who have significant mobility issues and would benefit from a move to accommodation that has level access showering facilities
- r) Children with severe conditions and a formal diagnosis such as autism, or cerebral palsy or ADHD where their long-term needs cannot be met without long term settled accommodation
- s) A person with a severe disability requiring some adaptations to their property that cannot be provided for in their current accommodation
- t) Where an applicant can access their home but struggles to access normal day-to-day facilities within it (e.g., bath/shower/toilet) without experiencing significant difficulty, pain or other discomfort, confirmed with evidence from a healthcare professional. This would include cases where an adaptation is possible but cannot be undertaken in a reasonable period of time. (Note: any priority would be removed if an adaptation is completed, or work started)

### **GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSING EXTRA BEDROOM REQUESTS FOR ADHD, AUSTISTIC SPECTRUM, SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES AND OTHER MENTAL OR PHYSICAL HEALTH PROBLEMS**

Following a successful Court challenge the Government has issued new guidance in relation to the social size criteria which allows Housing Benefit to be paid on an extra room for children who are unable to share because of their severe disabilities.

The judgement is not binding on councils in respect of their Allocation Policy, however, when an applicant says that their children are unable to share a bedroom it will be for the council to satisfy itself that this is the case.

In making an assessment for an extra bedroom for ADHD, Autism, sensory processing difficulties, and other mental or physical health problems the council will consider the following framework to help guide the assessing officer:

- the nature and severity of the disability
- the nature and frequency of any care required during the night; and
- the extent and regularity of the disturbance to the sleep of the child who would normally be required to share the bedroom

In all cases this will come down to a matter of judgement on facts of each individual case.

A claim should normally be supported by medical evidence and many children will be in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) care component at the middle or highest rate for their medical condition.

Requested evidence will include, but may not be limited to, the following:

- medical evidence detailing the nature of the disability, how this is effected by the home environment and the impact on other members of the household

- other supporting information from care and support agencies involved with the child and family (this should be specific information relating to the request for re-housing rather than a general letter of support and is likely to be from specialist rather than universal services); and,
- proof of DLA entitlement

The circumstances where a possible award of an extra bedroom may be made include a consideration of all of the facts set out below:

- a) Supporting letters for example from school SENCO stating that they also use a calm room at school and why, a letter specifying aggressive behaviour and frequency, behaviour flow charts, list of aggressive behaviours displayed at school, also stating the danger of child sharing alone with another child, their sensory issues, their inability to cope with small changes and reaction as a result
- b) Where there is professionally assessed evidence of a child or young person up to the age of 25 in the household who has a severe or profound learning difficulty, with a presentation of behavioural or emotional difficulties who exhibits sexually exploratory behaviour or other inappropriate behaviour of a serious nature and has a limited understanding around the impact of this on others. This may need to be certified by a consultant psychiatrist
- c) The applicant or a member of their household (adult or child), need major medical equipment for the long term, such as home dialysis, equipment for percutaneous external gastrostomy feeding, long term large assistive equipment or and/or bulky medical supplies which need to be used and stored on a permanent basis
- d) A DLA award letter stating high care and low mobility
- e) An assessment of need which supports the claim for an additional bedroom based on a severe impact where that assessment has been undertaken by the appropriate health or care professionals. The assessment would need to evidence that sharing with another family member who has care needs or behavioural problems that severely affect that family members ability to sleep, which in turn is having a very significant negative impact on their employment (to the extent that they may lose their permanent employment), or on their mental health (to the extent that they have been assessed with a severe mental health condition, or their current condition has become more severe, as a result of having to share)
- f) Carers award letter stating care award is due to care needing to be given day and night

Examples unlikely to qualify include:

- a) Circumstances, for example, where the claimant is one of a couple who is unable to share a bedroom

- b) Where children share and the claim is that by having to share this is impacting on their ability to study and complete homework but there is evidence that they are able to study elsewhere in the home or at relatives or using library services
- c) Where family members provide overnight care and support only at weekends or for part of the year
- d) People with mental health issues who say they want an extra room for a friend or relative who provides support
- e) A claim based solely on the wish that the applicant requires an additional room so that a child can cut themselves off from the world, which they claim is essential to their mental wellbeing
- f) People who are in receipt of formal overnight care (provided by NHS continuing care nurses, visiting agency carers, etc)

## **APPENDIX 3: RIGHT TO MOVE QUALIFYING CRITERIA**

Right to Move – Statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local housing authorities in England.

An existing social housing tenant (living outside of the Stevenage area) will not be disqualified on the grounds of no residential connection if they have reasonable preference under s166(3)(e) because of a need to move to the Stevenage area because the tenant works in the Stevenage area or needs to move to take up an offer of work.

Whether or not the applicant meets the above criteria isn't solely determined by the need to move for work, but that it would cause them hardship if they were able unable to do so.

### **Definition of Work**

- Work should be a permanent contract or one with a minimum term of 12 months.
- Work should be of 16 or more hours a week (unless it can be demonstrated that the earnings are substantial).
- Work should not be voluntary.
- Work can include apprenticeships.
- The relevant district should be the main place of work.
- In the case of self-employed tenants, work should be regular as opposed to intermittent.

### **Distance, time and travel costs**

When determining hardship, the time taken to travel to work and the cost of the travel should be taken into account. The council considers the following criteria may suggest hardship:

- Travel time to get to work is in excess of two hours each way (personal or public transport depending on circumstances).
- Travel costs are more than £30 per day or 25% of net income from the employment or there is no transport available at all.

### **Other factors**

These factors are all considered on a case-by-case basis as to whether hardship would be faced by the applicant if they could not move:

- Would failure to move mean the applicant would lose an opportunity to gain a better job/promotion, an apprenticeship, increase hours/pay or move from unemployment to employment.
- If the nature of work likely to be available closer to the applicant's home.
- Personal factors including care responsibilities and medical conditions affected by the tenant not being able to move closer to work.
- Any other situation where hardship would be demonstrable if the tenant could not move.

### **Discretion**

Every application will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis allowing all circumstances and variables to be considered.

### **Proof of Work**

A combination of the following can be used as to prove that work or a job offer is genuine:

- Contract of employment (particularly if stating main place of work).
- Wage slips showing hours worked (particularly if zero hours contract) but they are unlikely to evidence the location of work.
- A letter offering employment (it is likely that the employer will be contacted to confirm acceptance).
- A letter from an employer to prove the work and location.

### **Right to Move Quota**

No more than 1% of all lettings will be prioritised for Right to Move applicants based on the total of the previous year's lettings by the council.



## **APPENDIX 4: HOW ANY LOCAL LETTINGS POLICY WILL BE APPLIED AND REVIEWED**

Local lettings initiatives may be applied to meet the particular needs of a local ward or area or to address sustainability and community issues to ensure that the housing Allocation Policy is able to contribute to building sustainable communities.

They will be tailored to fit local situations in well-defined communities (such as a particular block of flats, an individual street, or new housing development, or may be applied to a parish or a village in a rural area). Each Local Lettings Policy will be based on a detailed analysis of relevant information gathered from a variety of sources and may include, for example, evidence from internal departments, partner Housing Associations, local Councillors, and the community itself. (Evidence may include information such as tenant profiling, the incidence of anti-social behaviour, and stock turnover in a particular block, street or area, a neighbourhood plan or the need to provide housing for local people in rural villages and parishes).

The following are examples of Local Lettings Policies that may be deployed under this policy. The list is for illustrative purposes and is not exhaustive.

- a) Age restrictions.
- b) Prioritising applicants who are key workers, as defined by the Council.
- c) Restrictions on lettings to vulnerable households where there are already a concentration of supported tenants/residents in a street or block.
- d) Lettings to childless households where there are high concentrations of children and young people living on a specific estate, street or block.
- e) Disregarding household type or property matching rules to allow, for example, under-occupation to reduce child density or to account for future family growth.
- f) Allowing, for example a 60 year old plus applicant to occupy 2 bedroom older person housing if there are sound management reasons and the person can afford the higher rent
- g) Ensuring that there is a balance of working and non-working households allocated to a Policy.

New developments may have Local Lettings Policies (usually only applies to first lettings) regardless of whether the new development is subject to a Section 106 agreement or affordable housing statement. Where a new development is subject to a Section 106 planning agreement the criteria set will be followed.

In order to ensure a reasonable mix of household sizes and types, and families with children of different ages, a Local Lettings Policy will normally be used for new developments larger than four properties. This may set restrictions on the number of lettings, which can be made to families with young children, for example, or the number of families who are not working.

### **How will a Local Lettings Policy be assessed and agreed?**

The Council will decide when a Local Lettings Policy may be appropriate and why.

There must be a clear evidence base for adopting a local lettings policy. The following framework will be used by the Council to decide whether a Local Lettings Policy is appropriate:

- a) That there is a clear definition of the objective to be achieved by that particular Local Lettings Policy.
- b) That there is a clear evidence base to back up the need for a Local Lettings Policy.
- c) That any potential equality impact has been considered.
- d) How long the Local Lettings Policy is intended to operate.
- e) When the Local Lettings Policy should be reviewed.

A written record of each policy adopted or rejected should be kept.

It is the intention that Local Lettings Policies will be fluid with new policies being added as are required and existing policies being deleted once the objective for that policy has been met.

Any property advert will state whether there are any local lettings restrictions or criteria.

## **APPENDIX 5: DEFINITIONS OF SUPPORTED HOUSING SCHEMES**

The definition of supported housing referred to in 3.6 of the Policy would include: Hertfordshire County Council supported schemes, Peabody supported housing for younger people, Haven OneYMCA and Housing First.

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## APPENDIX B

### Part 1 – Evaluation of responses to the consultation on proposed changes to the Allocation Policy 2023

### Part 2 - Demographic information from consultation on proposed changes to the Allocation Policy

#### Part 1 – Evaluation of responses to the consultation on proposed changes to the Allocation Policy with background information

##### 1. Proposed change one - Assessment of housing need

**Point for consideration** - Should we only accept applicants onto the Housing Register if they have a housing need? Those applicants defined as having a housing need or reasonable preference are shown in 3.2 of this report.

**Current Policy** - Applicants who are deemed as having no housing need in housing law are currently able to join the Housing Register and are given a priority banding according to their circumstances. This includes those adequately housed in the private rented sector or applicants without children living with family. In cases where there is no overcrowding or medical requirement for example, the banding would be low and the chances of securing accommodation slim.

**Recommended Change** - Under the proposed new policy, applicants without a housing need could not join the Housing Register. Those applicants currently in band D with a one bedroom need and all applicants in Band E are likely to be ineligible to join the Housing Register when the new policy is introduced. Those in band F would not qualify and not be able to join the register. Of the 4000 Housing applicants, this will affect approximately 2500 applicants. This will predominately be those currently in Band D with a one bedroom need and those in Band F who are currently unable to bid.

For some context, in 2022/2023 0 applicants from band E secured through choice based lettings. Within band D, 18 applicants with a one bedroom need secured and there was one family with a two bedroom need that secured through choice based lettings, which was selected due to the previously applied quota. In 2021/2022 only two applicants from band E secured a studio and a one bedroom property. Within band D in 2021/2022 19 applicants with a one bedroom need and four with a two bedroom need secured properties.

Whilst the figures show a high proportion of those currently on the register will be excluded if only those with a housing need are eligible, it is notable that within our last review, those not bidding for over two years included 1478 applications with 956 in band D or E with a one bedroom need. This would suggest that their housing need wasn't as pressing as those regularly bidding for properties.

**Question asked** - "Do you agree that we should only accept applicants onto the Housing Register if they have a housing need?"

## Responses -

	Agree	Percentage	Theme from comments
Original consultation	125	62%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other means of accommodation (Private rent (PRS)/mortgage) are perceived to be unaffordable or unstable (35 of 78 – 44%) <i>This also featured in social media comments</i></li> <li>• Everyone in Stevenage should have access to affordable housing/go on the register (26 of 78 – 33%) <i>There was a theme here of wanting children of tenants to be housed and also those who are “hard working”</i></li> <li>• People should be able to go onto the register to future proof against changes in circumstances (&lt;10%)</li> <li>• Other notable comments were               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Support for building more homes - <i>also featured on social media</i></li> <li>○ Support for “time points” - <i>this was a feature of the previous scheme, no longer a “waiting list” but register of need</i></li> <li>○ Support for five years (or more) in Stevenage eligibility criteria</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
New consultation	233	74%	Repeated themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Should be allowed in case circumstances changes</li> <li>- PRS/Mortgage perceived to be unaffordable/unstable</li> <li>- Everyone should have the “right”</li> <li>- Support for “time points”</li> <li>- Support for building more homes</li> </ul>
Community Select Committee	N/A	N/A	Members supported the change to ensure that social housing is allocated to those most in need.

**Further considerations** - Officers considered adding an additional ‘Housing Options’ band to the Housing Register for those without a recognised housing need. Staffing resource would be required to offer these applicants support and advice to create an Accommodation Options Plan.

Members consulted commented that creating this additional band would unfairly give applicants the impression that they are eligible to bid for social housing.

A key statutory function of the Housing Options team is to offer housing advice and support. This is not limited to those facing homelessness.

**Proposed changed to be included in new policy - Yes**

**2. Proposed change two – Disqualification in relation to finances**

**Point for consideration** - Should those with sufficient savings or income be disqualified from applying for social housing?

**Current Policy** - does not take income from benefits or wages into account when assessing housing need. Only savings in relation to the sale of a house are considered, with a current amount of £16,00 allowed from a sale within the last ten years.

**Recommended Change** - Only those who cannot afford to house themselves by other means through their current financial resources would be eligible for social housing.

There would be some exceptions, for example applicants wishing to go into sheltered housing.

**Question asked** – Do you agree that those with sufficient savings or income should be disqualified from applying for social housing?

**Responses -**

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Theme from comments</b>
Original consultation	124	61%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Even with savings/high earnings, other means of accommodation (PRS/mortgage) believed to be unaffordable (15 of 80 – 19%)</li> <li>• Having high income or savings shouldn't exclude people from the register (8 of 80 – 10%)</li> <li>• Even split between those who felt it should be based on <b>income</b> but not savings and those that support <b>savings</b> but not income (approx. 10% for each)</li> <li>• There were concerns about circumstances changing and whether other debts would be taken into account (9 of 80 – 11%) <i>This also featured on social media</i></li> <li>• There were concerns that it would penalise people for working hard or discourage employment (10 of 80 – 13%)</li> <li>• Support for five year tenancy to allow people to save for a deposit</li> <li>• Other notable comments were               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Support for an affordable buying or low start shared ownership scheme</li> <li>○ Concern about the administrative cost</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Suggestion to not exclude but award lower priority</li> <li>○ More information needed before they can support it</li> <li>● Suggestions for thresholds included <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Savings £10K - £100K</li> <li>○ Whatever is needed to get a mortgage (deposit) (2)</li> <li>○ Only savings from house sale within 10 years</li> <li>○ Income over £30K - £100K</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
New consultation	202	64%	<p>Repeated themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Perception that even with savings/income PRS/mortgage unaffordable</li> <li>- Concerns that it will put people off working</li> </ul>
Community Select Committee	N/A	N/A	<p>Members noted that any kind of means testing would be extremely resource intensive. Financial assessments would be required for applicants joining the register and before being offered a property to take account of changing circumstances. Also that the ever changing cost of living crisis would impact what the council deemed “affordable” and this would constantly need to be reviewed.</p>

**Further considerations** - Implement financial assessments alongside a new Allocation Policy will require additional staffing resources at a time when savings to the Housing Revenue Account are required.

**Proposed changed to be included in new policy** – No

However, this could be reconsidered as part of the review after the policy has been implemented for a year.

### 3. Proposed change three - New Generation Scheme

**Point for consideration** - Should Stevenage Borough Council introduce a New Generation Scheme, for single people and couples without children (who meet set criteria) to be given a one bedroom or studio home through the allocation of a yearly quota?

**Current Policy** - There isn't currently a scheme of this kind in Stevenage.

**Recommended Change** - This change would introduce a scheme to give single people and couples living with their parents in Stevenage access to a proportion of studio and one



bedroom homes which would be set aside especially for them. They would not need to have any other need, beyond being an adult, sharing with family. This recognises that this group of people in Stevenage have limited choices for being able to live independently.

**Question asked** “Do you agree that SBC should introduce a New Generation scheme?”

**Responses -**

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Theme from comments</b>
Original consultation	181	89%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• House those on the list first (6 out of 22 – 27%)</li> <li>• Young people should stay at home and save for a deposit (27%)</li> <li>• Doesn't take finances into account – <i>if financial eligibility criteria accepted, will resolve</i></li> <li>• Other notable comments – that the current scheme is adequate and this is considered “queue jumping”, requests for more information before they could agree</li> </ul>
New consultation	278	89%	Overall very positive as before (“best idea here”) with the same theme that this group could afford to PRS/buy Notable concerns about whether there is enough stock to facilitate this
Community Select Committee	N/A	N/A	Members noted that the question was not specific enough in terms of offering this scheme to children of all residents regardless of tenure as opposed to council tenants only. This would explain the high level of support during consultation.

**Further considerations** – Offering the scheme to adult children of all tenures would attract a high number of applicants. This would need to be balanced with the probability of securing accommodation. Offering the scheme to assist children of council tenants only would help relieve overcrowding in council family homes, help under-occupiers to downsize and make best use of stock by improving movement to more suitable accommodation.

If all of the proposed changes to this policy are implemented, housing register applicants requiring one bedroom or studio properties is likely to drop from the current 2203 to under 500. However, in the last year only 17 studios and 46 one bedroom properties were let, which indicates that stock levels aren't sufficient to support a new Generation Scheme.

**Proposed changed to be included in new policy – No**

Close monitoring of the impact of the policy during the first year of implementation may lead to this proposal being reconsidered as part of the review.

#### 4. Proposed change four – Reduction of priority bands

**Point for consideration** - Should the number of bands that applications can be placed into be reduced?

**Current Policy** - Our current policy has six priority bandings, covering a number of different circumstances.

- A – Urgent medical factors
- B – Very high priority
- C – High priority
- D - Medium priority
- E – Low priority
- F – No priority

**Recommended Change** - The proposed new policy includes three bands:

1 – Urgent priority statutory housing need to move. Includes:

- emergency medical or disability need where the applicant is suffering life threatening conditions and need an immediate move which may be to facilitate hospital discharge
- the applicant's condition is life threatening and the applicant's existing accommodation is a major contributory factor
- where an applicant's condition is expected to be terminal within a period of twelve months and rehousing is required for the provision of suitable care
- where overcrowding in the property leaves the applicant at risk of life-threatening infection.
- care leavers assessed as ready to move-on and all support services are in place for the transition to living independently
- residents of dwellings subject to a prohibition order, where problems cannot be resolved within six months and continuing to occupy will pose a considerable risk to the applicant's health
- statutory overcrowding or severe overcrowding by 3 bedrooms or more as defined by the bedroom standard in section 4 of the policy
- Armed Forces with an urgent housing need and have no access to other accommodation
- Applicants freeing up significantly adapted social housing where another applicant is assessed as in need of those adaptations.

2 – High priority statutory housing need to move. Includes:

- homeless applicants owed the main housing duty (no allocations eligibility criteria required)
- homeless applicants owed a relief duty and considered likely to be in priority need and unintentionally homeless and accommodated in interim temporary accommodation (allocations eligibility criteria required)
- pregnant applicants or those with children who are sharing a home with family or friends who meet the eligibility criteria of the Allocation Policy, are owed a homelessness prevention duty that has ended and has been allowed to stay at home for at least a year whilst they bid for social housing

- the applicant has severe, long term medical conditions and is living in accommodation assessed as being highly unsuitable and is directly detrimental to their health
- council tenants moving to a smaller property releasing high demand accommodation
- overcrowding by 2 bedrooms as defined by the bedroom standard in section 4 of the policy
- statutory or discretionary successors to a tenancy required to move to a smaller property
- private sector tenants living in a property that the council has determined poses a serious category 1 hazard under the Health and Safety fitness rating and the assessing officer is satisfied that the problem cannot be resolved by the landlord within 6 months.

3 – Lower priority statutory housing need to move. Includes:

- applicants where the homelessness relief duty has ended and has been assessed as intentionally homeless (allocations eligibility criteria required)
- applicants owed the homelessness main duty where the prevention or relief duty was brought to an end due to non-cooperation (no allocations eligibility criteria required)
- applicants owed a relief duty and not considered likely to be in priority need (allocations eligibility criteria required)
- applicants owed a prevention duty and not considered likely to be in priority need (allocations eligibility criteria required)
- homeless applicants where the relief duty has been brought to an end but not in priority need and therefore not owed a main homelessness duty (allocations eligibility criteria required)
- applicants who meet the criteria for Independent Living.
- Applicants ready to move on from council accredited supported housing schemes, as detailed in appendix 6 of the policy.
- Former regular armed forces applicants not meeting the legal requirement for additional preference but meet the criteria set out in section 5 of the policy.

All of the groups included in each band are detailed in appendix A, the Allocation policy, section 5.

**Question asked** “Do you agree that the number of bands that applicants can be placed into should be reduced?”

**Responses -**

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Theme from comments</b>
Original consultation	159	78%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequate as they are (12 of 44 – 27%)</li> <li>• Support for still applying a priority banding</li> <li>• Suggestion to only remove Band F</li> <li>• Suggestion to return to “time waiting” points, as in the old</li> </ul>

			<p>scheme (9%) <i>This was a theme throughout.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other notable comment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Suggestions to increase the number of bands</li> <li>○ Concern it would increase “waiting times”</li> <li>○ More guidance/information needed</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
New consultation	Not included		
Community Select Committee	N/A	N/A	Members agreed that fewer bands would be easier for applicants to understand and suggested the use of numbers rather than letters to avoid confusion.

**Further considerations** – Changing the banding is an opportunity to re-communicate about the housing register and manage expectations. Changing to numbers would avoid applicants comparing to the previous bands and interpreting their position incorrectly.

**Proposed changed to be included in new policy** – Yes

#### 5. Proposed change five – Removal of applicants who have not submitted a bid in a year.

**Point for consideration** - Should applicants who haven’t placed a bid in 12 months be removed from the housing register?

**Current Policy** - The current policy allows applicants to stay on the register even when they are not actively bidding for homes that become available under Choice Based Lettings. Applicants who have not bid for two years or more are placed into Band F and their application put on hold for six months.

**Recommended Change** - Applicants who have not bid within the last 12 months, without good reason, would have their application removed from the Housing Register and they would not be allowed to bid for homes, unless they applied again and would be given a new start date. Allowances would be made where applicants have good reason for choosing not to bid for suitable homes or suitable homes haven’t become available.

**Question asked** “Do you agree that applicants who haven’t placed a bid in 12 months should be removed from the register?”

**Responses** –

	Agree	Percentage	Theme from comments
<i>Original consultation</i>	151	75%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns where there haven’t been suitable homes available (13 of 51 – 25%) - <i>We will mitigate this by communicating with applicants before removing them</i></li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggestion to find out why and allow for legitimate reasons (8 of 51 – 16%) - <i>As above</i></li> <li>• Allow people to stay on in case their circumstances change (12%)</li> <li>• Other notable comments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Just simply disagreeing</li> <li>○ Concerns it would push people to bid for homes they don't want</li> <li>○ Suggestions that it should be either shorter (3 months) or longer (18 months)</li> <li>○ Support for the return of "time points"</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
New consultation	Not included		
Community Select Committee	N/A	N/A	Members agreed in principle, provided applicants are given sufficient information on how to bid and exceptions are made for those who have not been able to bid for good reason or that suitable properties haven't been available.

**Further considerations** – Asking applicants to re-register each year was considered, but generally deemed to be an unnecessary burden on applicants and officers to process.

Officers will ensure that sufficient communication is made with applicants to avoid anyone being unfairly affected.

**Proposed changed to be included in new policy** – Yes

## 6. Proposed change six – Removing “sharing” letting of new homes between the bands

**Point for consideration** - This change removes the practice introduced by the 2014 Allocations Policy review that ensures applicants across bands A to E get a share of the homes available to let each year via a quota system. This means that not all properties are let to those most in need.

**Current Policy** - The current policy ensures that applicants across bands A to E get a share of the homes available to let each year via a quota system. The quota is on the website and broken down in the table <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/council-housing-in-stevenage>

Band	Priority	Quota % of lettings
A	Urgent priority	0.50%
B	Very high priority	34%
C	High priority	22%
D	Medium priority	29%
E	Low priority	0.50%
F	No priority	0%

Total		86%
Transfers no preference / direct lets		10%
Temporary accommodation		4%

**Recommended Change** - To remove the quota and award housing based on housing need only.

A proportion of homes will still be offered on a direct let basis each year to specific applicants, for example those moving on from temporary accommodation, having to move from their home in an emergency or needing specific aids and adaptations. An annual statement will outline the percentage of properties to be allocated to these groups.

**Question asked** “Do you agree that we should let homes based on housing need only, removing the sharing between bands?”

	Agree	Percentage	Theme from comments
Original consultation	150	75%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The current system is fair (13 of 51 – 25%)</li> <li>• Concerns that certain groups of people will never be offered a home</li> <li>• Support for more house building</li> <li>• Support for time points – <i>as before</i></li> </ul>
New consultation	Not included		
Community Select Committee	N/A	N/A	Members agreed that it is not acceptable for those with lower priority to take priority over those applicants with higher housing needs.

**Proposed changed to be included in new policy** – Yes

## 7. Proposed change seven - Bedroom standard changes

**Point for consideration** - Should the bedroom standard be changed to allow for more household members to share, without requiring their own bedroom?

**Current Policy** - The current policy says that you are **not** overcrowded if you have

- One bedroom for every adult couple (including civil partners)
- One bedroom for every adult aged 16 or over (including lodgers or boarders)
- One bedroom for any two children of the same sex under age 16
- One bedroom for any two children regardless of their sex under age 10
- One bedroom for any other child

**Recommended Change** - The consultation proposed that anyone who has the following, is **not** overcrowded

- One bedroom for applicant and partner/spouse (if any)
- One bedroom for any additional adult couple
- One bedroom for any two additional people of the same sex
- One bedroom for any two additional people of the opposite sex aged nine and under
- One bedroom for any additional person

To give an example, in the current policy, two brothers aged 16 and 17 would need a bedroom each, under this proposed change, they could share. Exceptions such as when someone needs their own bedroom owing to medical conditions would apply.

**Question asked** “Do you agree that the bedroom standard should be changed to allow for more household members to share, without requiring their own bedroom?”

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Theme from comments</b>
Original consultation	114	56%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs to be a consideration of age (22 of 88 – 25%) –<i>Agreed, we need to specify that anyone over the age of 21 needs their own bedroom</i></li> <li>• Concerns that homes aren’t large enough to have privacy (16%)</li> <li>• Every child needs their own bedroom (13%)</li> <li>• Support for building new homes or extending existing ones</li> <li>• Concerns that it doesn’t solve housing issues by making the change – <i>this is accurate, although it is hoped the <b>most</b> overcrowded will be moved first</i></li> </ul>
New consultation	Not included		
Community Select Committee	N/A	N/A	Members did not support the proposal made in the consultation. The main objective that adults of the same sex would be forced to share a bedroom. Members supported the amendments made to the proposal that ensure that children of the opposite sex over age 10 and adults of the same sex are eligible for their own bedroom.

**Further considerations and proposed change following consultation** – A revised bedroom standard has been included in the proposed policy. This takes into account responses to the consultation and advice from Members that the policy addresses the issue of overcrowding across the borough and recognises that children of the opposite sex over age 10 and adults of the same sex require their own bedroom.

The following bedroom standard has been included in the proposed new policy:

- One bedroom for applicant and partner/spouse (if any)
- One bedroom for any additional adult couple
- One bedroom for any two additional people of the same sex (up to the age of 18)
- One bedroom for any two additional people of the opposite sex under age 10
- One bedroom for any additional person (aged 18 or over)

In addition to the changes to the bedroom standard above, it is also proposed that the current practice of allowing families with two young children to secure three bedroom properties will be removed in order to meet the immediate demand of overcrowded families. During 2021/2022, 44 three bedroom properties were let. Of these 21 (~48%) would be only eligible for a two bedroom property according to the proposed new Allocation Policy, eight of which had received priority as they were homeless applicants with main duty accepted. During 2022/2023, 52 three bedroom properties were let. Of these 29 (~56%) would be only eligible for a two bedroom property according to the proposed new Allocation Policy, 20 of which had received priority as they were homeless applicants with main duty accepted. Over ten offers of two bedroom properties were let to applicants in band C with two children under the age of 6, which indicates that those applicants in band B, often in temporary accommodation, are selectively bidding.

Removing the practice of allowing applicants with a two bedroom need to secure three bedroom properties, is likely to increase demand for two bedroom properties going forward. However, the proposed new policy will positively impact those council tenants currently in two bedroom properties, who are genuinely overcrowded such as with two children of opposite gender or with three children. Those applicants will receive priority and when they move, the movement of properties will lead to the housing needs of multiple applicants being met.

Another positive impact of removing this practice would be that tenants with a two bedroom need who are eligible for three bedroom properties according to the current policy, who mutually exchanging to another property and are therefore eligible for properties with one extra bedroom, would no longer be eligible to exchange into four bedroom properties. This would ensure that larger households are more likely to exchange into any available four bedroom properties.

**Proposed changed to be included in new policy – Yes**

## **Part 2 - Demographic information from consultation on proposed changes to the Allocation Policy**

Source - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/>

Population – 89,500 in Stevenage. 95% confidence value would be achieved from 350-400 responses. 551 responses in total. Margin of error of 4%.

The consultation is statistically relevant.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Answers</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Census</b>
<b>Are you?</b>	Applicant/potential applicant	232	42%	
	Tenant of SBC	151	27%	26%
	Resident of Stevenage	112	20%	
	Employed by a partner	5	1%	
	Employee of SBC	18	3%	



<b>If applicant</b>	Homeless	30	13%	
	Unable to join register	4	2%	
	On the housing register	197	85%	
<b>If on register</b>	Band A	1	1%	
	Band B	10	5%	
	Band C	39	20%	
	Band D	70	36%	
	Band E	19	10%	
	Band F	4	2%	
	Don't know	52	26%	
<b>How many in the household</b>	Single person	128	23%	28.9%
	Couple	65	12%	
	Couple plus one child	64	12%	
	Couple plus two or more children	130	24%	
	Single person plus one child	61	11%	
	Single person with two or more children	66	12%	
<b>Disabled?</b>	Yes	123	22%	18.5%
	No	392	71%	81.5%
<b>Age group</b>	Under 18	17	3%	24%
	18-24	64	12%	20.5
	25-34	161	29%	15.1%
	35-44	145	26%	20.4% (to 49)
	45-54	64	12%	19.5% (50-64)
	55 or over	66	12%	15.2% (65 +)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	135	25%	In Stevenage the gender split is approximately 50:50
	Female	368	67%	
	Trans man	0	0%	
	Trans woman	0	0%	
	Non-binary	1	0%	
	Prefer not to say	12	2%	
<b>Ethnic group</b>	White English	436	79%	82.8%
	White/Asian	4	1%	7.5%
	White other	25	5%	3.6% (for mixed)
	White/Black Caribbean	14	3%	
	White/Black African	4	1%	
	Other mixed	2	0%	
	Black Caribbean	6	1%	4.8% merged
	Black African	12	2%	
	Indian	3	1%	Included in 3.6% above
	Bangladeshi	1	0%	
	Pakistani	2	0%	
	Other	10	2%	
				1.3%

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Stevenage Borough Council

Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit

## What is the legal background of equality and diversity?

### The Equality Act 2010

Everyone's right to be treated fairly is covered in law by the Equality Act 2010, which came into force in October 2010. The Act protects nine characteristics and they are:

Age	Disability	Gender reassignment
Marriage or civil partnership	Pregnancy and maternity	Race
Religion or belief	Sex	Sexual orientation

When a person feels that they have not been treated fairly because of any of these characteristics it is called unlawful discrimination.

### The Public Sector Equality Duty

Section 149 of The Equality Act 2010 is called the Public Sector Equality Duty. Stevenage Borough Council has a statutory obligation to comply with the requirements of the Duty which are to carry out our functions in a way that gives due regard to the need to:

- **Remove discrimination, harassment, victimisation** and any other conduct that is unlawful under this Act
- **Promote equal opportunities** between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't
- **Encourage good relations** between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

## What is an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)?

A process that helps us to evidence and understand the impacts that our decisions might have on different types of people, and improve them where we can. These decisions can relate to existing services, policies and functions, procurement exercises, plans for future changes and new projects.

It is designed to help us think about both positive and negative impacts on people and look at how to avoid disadvantage or further improve our services.

The aim is to make sure that we plan, develop and deliver fair and inclusive services and that we promote equality and positive relationships between the different communities that we serve.

Although the assessment of any socio-economic impact has been removed from the Act, officers at Stevenage are encouraged to use their discretion in assessing impact on people who are less fortunate because of their social and / or economic background.

## Why do we do them?

EqlAs have been used at Stevenage for a number of years and are a really useful way of showing how we consider the needs of our diverse communities and staff. And by using them effectively, we'll be able to mitigate any potential legal challenge of discrimination under the Equality Act 2010. EqlAs help us to:

- Consider the differing needs of people in our community and workforce
- Demonstrate to all of our stakeholders that we place great importance on meeting and understanding the needs of different residents and employees
- Ensure that decisions are made in a fair, transparent and accountable way
- Focus our activity on delivering positive outcomes for our communities instead of being process-driven
- Meet our legislative requirements under the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty.

## Who should complete EqlAs?

Anyone who has to develop and deliver policy, strategy, projects, and services, or make decisions that could impact on people. There should be more than one officer involved in developing the EqlA so that a range of views can be considered. For example a:

- Project manager and lead officers involved in the project
- Service manager and staff involved in delivering the service
- Policy / strategy developer and representatives from other SDUs who will be delivering the function.

## How do I complete it?

This toolkit should provide you with most of the information you need to get started, including a few pointers to help you to decide which level of EqlA will be most useful. The two options are a Brief EqlA and a Full EqlA.

You'll see as you go through the toolkit that in addition to using your expertise, the decisions and potential impacts identified should be evidenced as far as possible. A great way of evidencing is by way of consulting with people who are likely to be affected by the outcome, and by analysing local data.

You may find that you complete a Brief EqlA and identify a need to further analyse the impact in a Full EqlA. This is a great example of how it can help to inform and guide decision-making, and demonstrates to our customers, staff and stakeholders that we take equality and inclusion seriously.

## When should an EqlA be started?

In the early stages of your activity and certainly before any decision is made. It's very unlikely that it will be completed in one go – you'll find it useful to keep coming back to it, updating as new evidence comes to light, or as different viewpoints are taken into account.

It's a good idea to keep copies of previous versions – not just to help you to keep track, but it can also demonstrate where we have changed a decision or planned direction in light of a potential impact on particular groups.

### **Your EqlA should not be completed at the end of the process as:**

- Your decision could cause discrimination, or benefit certain equality groups more than others
- Time and resource could be used inefficiently if the decision has to be reviewed
- You could miss an opportunity to further promote equality and inclusion
- Your decision could fail to meet the council's statutory requirements and create a risk of legal challenge.

## What kinds of things should I consider?

When completing an EqlA it's helpful to think about the following:

### **Negative / Positive / Unequal impact**

It's unlikely that a decision will impact on people in light of every characteristic. Where there is no impact or actions identified, feel free to add N/A (not applicable).

Please be aware that where there is a negative impact, you will not necessarily be expected to mitigate this. The aim of the EqlA is to demonstrate that we have given due regard to the potential impact on people and have taken action as far as is practical and reasonable.

- How will different groups of people be affected if the decision is implemented as planned?
- Does the data and evidence collected highlight problems that need to be addressed, such as disadvantage, discrimination and harassment?
- Does the evidence suggest increased or lower than expected (unequal) uptake, access or participation by different groups?
- Are there any rules, requirements or regulations around it that might affect accessibility?
- Is there evidence of better outcomes for different groups?
- Are current measures in place and having a positive impact on particular groups?

## Evidence of potential impact

Collect, analyse and record information and data relating to the protected characteristics or any other groups that may be affected. Examples could include:

- Service user data
- Results of consultation, involvement activities or surveys
- Feedback from service users on their outcomes and experiences
- Information about the town, its wards and local communities such as Census data
- Comparisons made with similar policies / services in other departments or authorities
- Recommendations from inspections, audit reports and reviews
- National, regional and local research findings
- Information from partners, trade unions and local groups from the voluntary and community sector.

## Opportunities to promote equality and inclusion

- What more can we do to positively impact on these groups?
- Is there an opportunity to improve access and outcomes for different groups?
- How can communications be used more effectively?
- Is there an opportunity to promote positive attitudes and good relations between different groups?

## What do we still need to find out?

- What gaps in evidence and information have been found?
- How can these be filled?
- When will this information be captured and reviewed in completing this EqIA?

You should collate and assess all the information you need **before a decision** on your activity is made. If you don't there is an increased risk of exposing the council to legal challenge, if a wrong, inappropriate or ineffective decision is made.

## Consultation

As a co-operative council, we aim to involve our staff, communities and stakeholders in decision-making as much as possible. This should always be proportionate to the scale of the decision being made, how many people might be affected or interested and the level of impact it will have.

- How have the views and knowledge of staff who will be delivering the service been considered? Have staff more generally been able to contribute?
- What have your customers fed back?
- Have you consulted the voluntary and community sector in making your decision? How will they be engaged in future?
- Have you drawn on the knowledge of partnering organisations?
- How have other stakeholder been able to contribute and what have they said?

## Conclusion and actions

- Have inequalities, inclusions issues or opportunities to further improve equality and inclusion been identified?
- What adjustments have been made to your initial plan as a result of this EqIA?
- If you are continuing as planned or are stopping altogether, what are the reasons?
- What can be done to prevent, minimise or mitigate any negative or unequal impacts identified?
- How can you help people who are vulnerable, stereotyped or marginalised?
- What opportunities are there to remove discrimination and harassment, promote equal opportunities and encourage better relations amongst our communities?
- How could your function be more accessible to people who are underrepresented or don't currently use your service?

## Where can I find more information?

Our intranet has lots of useful information, or you can email [equalities@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@stevenage.gov.uk) for help and guidance.

We also have a network of Equality Champions across the council – please ask your Head of Service for information on who your representative is.

## How do I get started?

By turning over the page!



## First things first: does this activity need an EqlA?

<b>Subject of the assessment:</b>	<b>Allocation Policy Review</b>	
<b>Please answer Yes or No to the following questions:</b>		
Does it affect staff, service users or the wider community?		Yes
Has it been identified as being important to particular groups of people?		Yes
Does it or could it potentially affect different groups of people differently (unequal)?		No
Does it relate to an area where there are known inequalities or exclusion issues?		No
Will it have an impact on how other organisations operate?		Yes
Is there potential for it to cause controversy or affect the council's reputation as a public service provider?		Yes

<b>Where a positive impact is likely, will this help to:</b>	<b>Please tick all that apply (✓)</b>
Remove discrimination and harassment?	✓
Promote equal opportunities?	✓
Encourage good relations?	✓

If you ticked or answered Yes to one or more of these questions you should carry out an EqlA. There are two levels of analysis (Brief and Full) and in deciding which to go for, you should think about not just the number of people affected but the significance of the effect on them – both positive and negative.

.....

If you answered No to all of the questions and decide that your activity doesn't need an EqlA you must explain below why it has no relevance to equality and diversity. You should reference the information you used to support your decision and seek approval from your Head of Service or Strategic Director before sending this to [equalities@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@stevenage.gov.uk).



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# Full Equality Impact Assessment

For a policy, project, service or other decision that is new, changing or under review

<b>What is being assessed?</b>		<b>Allocations Policy Review</b>			
Lead Assessor	Lori Smith, Housing Supply Manager, Stevenage Borough Council			Assessment team	Tracy Jackson, Operations Manager (Providing Homes), Stevenage Borough Council  Lettings Officer / Allocations Assistant.  Carrie Addams – Continuous Improvement Manager
Start date	November 2022	End date	November 2024		
	Reviewed September 23				
When will the EqIA be reviewed?		November 2024			

Page 159

Who may be affected by it?	<p>People wishing to join the Housing Register</p> <p>People currently on the Housing Register</p> <p>Anyone wanting to access social housing in Stevenage.</p> <p>Our Internal and external partners – particularly those we have nomination rights with</p>
What are the key aims of it?	<p>To assess the current allocations policy and make relevant changes to create realistic expectations surrounding social tenancies, with the aim of making best use of council stock. The new policy aims to apply a priority banding based on need, being open, fair and transparent.</p>

What **positive measures** are in place (if any) to help **fulfil our legislative duties** to:

What sources of data / information are you using to inform your assessment?

We have researched other local authorities of similar size to Stevenage and their allocations policies, from this we have been able to identify new ideas from their policies that could replace and improve our current policy. We have also sought the advice of a consultant expert and our shared services legal team.

To help frame the proposed policy, consultation on seven proposals took place for eight weeks beginning in October 2022. Responses were collected online and in person.

To allow for more face to face discussions, a further two weeks of consultation on questions 1, 2 and 3 was carried out in December 2022. Further online responses were also received during this period.

Key groups across the community were consulted including Housing Register applicants from all bands, those not on the register, older people, single people, homeless, minorities and those with disabilities. Key stakeholder organisations were also consulted including Housing Associations, County Council services and mental Health Services. Members of the Community Select Committee representing all elected parties in Stevenage also provided feedback and recommendations in March and September 2023. The Leader of the council and the Deputy Leader of the council – Executive Member for Housing and Housing Development were also consulted.

The response rate was high and the results classed as robust. The population is 89,500 in Stevenage. A 95% confidence value would be achieved from 350-400 responses and 551 responses were received in total giving a margin of error of 4%. By referring to demographic information at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/> We were able to confirm that the respondents accurately reflected the population of Stevenage and the consultation is statistically relevant.

The consultation responses were used to inform decisions made on the proposed changes to the policy. The proposed changes will be reviewed by the Executive of Stevenage Borough Council on 12 October 2023.

<p>In assessing the potential impact on people, are there any overall comments that you would like to make?</p>	<p>It is important that, as a Local Authority, we monitor and assess the impact this strategy may have on people wishing to join our Housing Register. We need to ensure that there is no indirect, or direct, discrimination, contrary to our public sector equality duty. We are morally and legally accountable for ensuring our homes are let in a way that doesn't put any individuals or marginalised groups at a disadvantage.</p>
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## Evidence and impact assessment

Explain the potential impact and opportunities it could have for people in terms of the following characteristics, where applicable:

Page 161

Age				
Positive impact	Yes	Negative impact		Unequal impact
<p>Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment</p>	<p>The new scheme will reference the opportunity to take Independent Living allocations out of the current scheme, including Choice Based Lettings, to allow the department to make best use of stock.</p> <p>This type of housing tends to be for older people and will make their allocation of new homes a smoother and easier process.</p> <p>A potential “New Generation Scheme ‘otherwise known as a “concealed household scheme’ which could positively have advantaged younger people by giving them more chance of being allocated a social home by providing a quota of lettings per year to this group was considered and received a positive response in consultation. However, in the last year only 17 studios and 46 one bedroom properties were let, which indicates that stock levels aren’t sufficient to support a new Generation Scheme.</p> <p>Close monitoring of the impact of the policy during the first year of implementation may lead to this proposal being reconsidered as part of the review.</p> <p>Care leavers, usually 18 to 21 years, have been positively impacted by the changes to the policy. Care leavers will be given the opportunity to bid on 1-bedroom properties and also band 1 priority. Currently they are only permitted to bid on studio accommodation. Availability of this type of accommodation is very limited and results in care leavers waiting for extended periods to secure a home. The change will speed up their ability to move on when they are assessed as ready to live independently.</p>			

	<p>Please note the current age limit for the scheme is age 16 to join housing register, and have a tenancy at 18 years' old.</p> <p>We have taken these data sources into account - Herts Insight Diversity Profile - Age</p> <p><a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/638ca3f75a2541799e068399579d719e/E07000243">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/638ca3f75a2541799e068399579d719e/E07000243</a></p> <p>2021 Census Profile:  <a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true</a>  <a href="https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/">https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/</a> - latest changes in Stevenage.</p>		
<p>What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?</p>		<p>What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)</p>	<p>Results of the consultation on the New Generation proposal</p>

Page 162

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Disability</b>  e.g. physical impairment, mental ill health, learning difficulties, long-standing illness</p>					
Positive impact	Yes	Negative impact		Unequal impact	
<p>Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment</p>	<p>Reviewing the policy includes determining how to award priority to disabled applicants who require aids and adaptations, in a way that is fair and transparent. A major proposed change to the policy is that only applicants with a housing need in reasonable preference groups including a need to move on medical or welfare grounds will be able to join the Housing Register. The quota system which spreads a percentage of lettings across all bands and therefore means properties are let to those with low priority is being removed. This will ensure that social housing in the borough is let to those most in need which will positively impact applicants with disabilities.</p>				

	<p>We have taken these data sources into account - Herts Insight Diversity Profile - Disability</p> <p><a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/638ca3f75a2541799e068399579d719e/E07000243">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/638ca3f75a2541799e068399579d719e/E07000243</a></p> <p>2021 Census Profile:</p> <p><a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/">https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/</a> - latest changes in Stevenage.</p>		
<p>What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?</p>	<p>To make the policy clear and transparent, ensuring all disabled customers receive equitable treatment and priority.</p>	<p>What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)</p>	<p>Results of the consultation, particularly around banding for housing need and the number of bands</p>

Page 163

<h3 style="text-align: center;">Gender reassignment</h3>					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
<p>Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment</p>	<p>No impact in terms of housing registration – not compulsory question for registration</p> <p>We have taken these data sources into account - Herts Insight Diversity Profile - Transgender</p> <p><a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/638ca3f75a2541799e068399579d719e/E07000243">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/638ca3f75a2541799e068399579d719e/E07000243</a></p> <p>2021 Census Profile:</p> <p><a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/">https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/</a> - latest changes in Stevenage.</p>				

What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	N/A	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	N/A

Marriage or civil partnership					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	No impact				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	N/A	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	N/A		

Page 164

Pregnancy & maternity					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>A proposed change to the policy is to offer priority banding to pregnant applicants or those with children who are sharing a home with family or friends and who meet the Allocation Policy eligibility criteria, are owed a homelessness prevention duty that has ended and have been allowed to stay at home for at least a year whilst they bid for social housing. This will have a positive impact on this group as it gives them an opportunity to avoid presenting to the council as homeless and staying in temporary accommodation whilst their application is assessed.</p> <p>We have taken these data sources into account - Herts Insight Early Years Profile</p>				



<p><a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/c0060a87d61a4c0dbea7bfebb6bf84e/E10000015?clear=true">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/c0060a87d61a4c0dbea7bfebb6bf84e/E10000015?clear=true</a></p> <p>2021 Census Profile:  <a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/">https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/</a> - latest changes in Stevenage.</p>			
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	N/A	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	N/A

Page 165

Race					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>Race is not a compulsory question for the Housing Register, however, the policy gives Gypsy or Traveller households consideration when applying the residency criteria where the applicant may not fully meet the five years in the last seven rule, if that period has been broken by travelling but the applicant has spent the majority of the time residing in Stevenage. This will ensure that these households are not unfairly disadvantaged by the residency eligibility criteria.</p> <p>We have taken these data sources into account - Herts Insight Diversity Profile - Ethnicity</p> <p><a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/638ca3f75a2541799e068399579d719e/E07000243">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/638ca3f75a2541799e068399579d719e/E07000243</a></p> <p>2021 Census Profile:  <a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true</a></p>				

	<p><a href="https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/">https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/</a> - latest changes in Stevenage.</p> <p>By referring to demographic information at <a href="https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/">https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/</a> we were able to confirm that the consultation respondents accurately reflected the population of Stevenage and the results are statistically relevant.</p>		
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	N/A	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	N/A

<b>Religion or belief</b>					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>No impact – this is not something that we assess or discriminate against in the register application process.</p> <p>We have taken these data sources into account - Herts Insight Diversity Profile - Religion</p> <p><a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/638ca3f75a2541799e068399579d719e/E07000243">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/638ca3f75a2541799e068399579d719e/E07000243</a></p> <p>2021 Census Profile:</p> <p><a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/">https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/</a> - latest changes in Stevenage.</p>				

What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	Possible cultural differences – larger families / more than one family looking to share?	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	Results of the consultation, if there is demand/feedback in relation to religion or belief we will review this section.
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Sex					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>No impact – this is not something that we assess or discriminate against.</p> <p>We have taken these data sources into account - Herts Insight Diversity Profile - Gender</p> <p><a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/638ca3f75a2541799e068399579d719e/E07000243">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/638ca3f75a2541799e068399579d719e/E07000243</a></p> <p>2021 Census Profile:</p> <p><a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true</a>.</p> <p><a href="https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/">https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/</a> - latest changes in Stevenage.</p>				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	N/A	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	N/A		

## Sexual orientation

e.g. straight, lesbian / gay, bisexual

Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>No impact – this is not something that we assess or discriminate against.</p> <p>We have taken these data sources into account - Herts Insight Diversity Profile – Sexual Orientation  <a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/638ca3f75a2541799e068399579d719e/E07000243">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/638ca3f75a2541799e068399579d719e/E07000243</a></p> <p>2021 Census Profile:  <a href="https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true">https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/79b7917a1c72415ea39bca5ed45c6094/E10000015?clear=true</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/">https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/</a> - latest changes in Stevenage.</p>				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	N/A		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	N/A	

## Socio-economic<sup>1</sup>

e.g. low income, unemployed, homelessness, caring responsibilities, access to internet, public transport users, social value in procurement

<sup>1</sup>Although non-statutory, the council has chosen to implement the Socio-Economic Duty and so decision-makers should use their discretion to consider the impact on people with a socio-economic disadvantage.

Positive impact	Yes	Negative impact		Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>Currently the Allocations Scheme excludes applicants who have over £16,000 of savings from the sale of a former home from joining the Housing Register. Consideration was given to extending this to exclude those who can afford to find accommodation in the private or owned sector by setting limits on earnings and assets. This however has not been included in the proposed changes to the policy because Members were concerned about the need to continually review current affordable limits and the staffing resources are not available to carry out regular affordability assessments.</p> <p>We have taken these data sources into account -Herts Insight Economy, Work &amp; Education Profile <a href="https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/herts-insight/topics/economy-work-and-education.aspx">https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/herts-insight/topics/economy-work-and-education.aspx</a> <a href="https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/">https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000243/</a> - latest changes in Stevenage.</p> <p>The new proposed policy will award those at socio-economic disadvantage such as those living in overcrowded accommodation and homeless applicants priority banding.</p>				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	If the proposed change is accepted those at a socio-economic disadvantage would have more chance of being successful for a social home owing to the reduced number of applicants competing for available properties	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	Results of the consultation		

<b>Other</b>					
<b>please feel free to consider the potential impact on people in any other contexts</b>					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and	Any others?				

information you used to support this assessment			
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	

**What are the findings of any consultation with:**

Staff?	Staff are included in the consultation	Residents?	Included in the consultation
Voluntary & community sector?	Included in the consultation	Partners?	Included in the consultation
Other stakeholders?	Councillors will have an input during the scheme approval process		

Page 170

## Overall conclusion & future activity

Explain the <b>overall findings</b> of the assessment and <b>reasons for outcome (please choose one)</b> :		
1. No inequality, inclusion issues or opportunities to further improve have been identified		
Negative / unequal impact, barriers to inclusion or improvement opportunities identified	2a. Adjustments made	
	2b. Continue as planned	
	2c. Stop and remove	

Detail the <b>actions that are needed</b> as a result of this assessment and how they will help to <b>remove discrimination &amp; harassment, promote equal opportunities</b> and / or <b>encourage good relations</b> :				
Action	Will this help to remove, promote and / or encourage?	Responsible officer	Deadline	How will this be embedded as business as usual?
Review the outcomes of the consultation against the factors above	Ensure it has been considered	Carrie Addams	Pre-Executive	It will form part of the final policy

Page 171

**Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director: Rob Gregory**  
**Date: 04/04/2023**

**Updated by Operations Manager - Providing Homes: Tracy Jackson**  
**Date: 28/9/23**



Please send this EqlA to [equalities@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@stevenage.gov.uk)





Part I – Release to Press

**Meeting** Executive  
**Portfolio Area** All  
**Date** 12 October 2023



## STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN - MAKING STEVENAGE EVEN BETTER

### KEY DECISION

**Authors** Sally Norman  
**Contributor** Strategic Leadership Team  
**Lead Officers** Matt Partridge | 2456  
Richard Protheroe | 2938  
**Contact Officer** Richard Protheroe | 2938

#### 1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek approval for the draft Corporate Plan which outlines the Council's vision and strategic priorities for the next five years, and the approach to involving residents, local community groups, partners in its development.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Executive agree the Council's draft Corporate Plan 'Making Stevenage Even Better', as appended to this report.
- 2.2 That the engagement approach with residents, local community groups, and partner involvement be agreed as set out in Paragraph 4.9 of this report.
- 2.3 That following the engagement period a final version of the Corporate Plan is brought to the Executive in January 2024.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

#### **3.1 Corporate Plan**

3.1.1 The Corporate Plan is a key strategic document for the Council and must be considered as part of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

3.1.2 The Corporate Plan provides a strategic link between the national and local policy agenda, Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) joint-partnership objectives, and delivery of services. The priorities inform the Council's budget setting process and direction of travel for the Council over the next five years. The outcomes in the plan set out what the Council wants to achieve, and these inform the focus of project work in Service Plans across the authority.

#### **3.2 Future Town Future Council**

3.2.1 The previous Corporate Plan 'Future Town Future Council' was agreed by the Council in December 2016 and set out the Council's approach to meeting the needs of the community. On 24 February 2021, the Council agreed to extend the current Corporate Plan beyond its original 5-year term and in July 2021, the FTFC programme was consolidated into four external-facing programmes and one internal-facing enabling programme:

- Transforming Our Town
- More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Homes
- Cooperative Neighbourhoods
- A Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town
- Making Your Money Count (Enabling)

3.2.3 In June 2023, it was agreed that the significant investment in social housing (£24.6 million in 23/24) should be reflected in the FTFC priority 'More Social and Affordable Homes'. This priority was subsequently amended to 'More Social, Affordable & Good Quality Homes' for 2023/24.

3.2.4 In September 2023, it was agreed that as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy update and in recognition of the need to be transparent about the impact of cost-of-living pressures, the FTFC priority 'Making Your Money Count' would be amended to 'Balancing the Budget'.

### **4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS**

4.1 The Future Town Future Council (FTFC) Corporate Plan has been extended beyond its 5-year life twice since 2021. The Council's key drivers, vision and values have changed since it was approved in 2016.

4.2 The Council has faced, and is continuing to face, a number of significant challenges and opportunities that must be considered to inform its vision for the coming years. These include:

## **Challenges**

### **4.2.1 Financial Pressure**

- since 2011 there has been an 85% reduction in Government funding which has led to significant financial pressures on the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
- the HRA has been subject to changes in rent policy (e.g., 1% rent reduction 2016/17-2019/20) since the Council paid £199 million to the government for the self-financing deal
- the financial challenge has been exacerbated by increases in inflation which is much greater than council tax rises (capped by government policy), or increases in business rates or availability of Government grants
- when combining both Government funding cuts and unfunded inflation the total reduction in spend per household in Stevenage is equivalent to £325.20 per year
- this has resulted in the Council needing to find cumulative savings in excess of £11Million to meet the shortfall between reduced funding and increases in annual inflation.

### **4.2.2 National and Local Policy**

- in 2022/23 additional legislative regulations were introduced with an increased focus on compliance (e.g., the Social Housing Regulation Act, Building Safety Act and Fire Safety Act) this has required additional investment and has been coupled with new tenant satisfaction and tenancy management requirements in 2023/24
- there is an urgent need to improve energy efficiency in the delivery of council services, maintenance of assets and social housing stock in response to the climate emergency
- Changing political landscape e.g. forthcoming general elections and an uncertain legislative programme
- Low levels of unemployment affecting recruitment and retention of staff
- Change in partnership landscape (Local Enterprise Partnerships to be abolished from April 2024)
- Increasing demands related to the use of services in response to the Cost-of-Living crisis i.e. homeless costs, access to benefits and support services
- All-out election and County Council elections in 2024

## **Opportunities**

4.2.3 Despite these challenges the Council has remained financially resilient and continues to deliver for its residents, this includes:

- £14 million savings since 2010 to bridge the government funding and inflation deficit
- 394 new homes provided since 2014
- a significant period of town centre regeneration including a new bus station, multi-storey car-park, event Island, provision of new residential and commercial property
- £23.95 million business grants administered to Stevenage businesses to March 2022 (18 schemes/4375 businesses)
- £37.5 million Towns Fund funding obtained to support new leisure centre, museum and cycleways

- growth in the life science industry through work with partners, including a new £65 million European Headquarters for Autolus Therapeutics, a new life sciences development at the Forum (anticipated to generate economic growth of £98 million and 1,850 jobs) and the establishment of new training facility (Stevenage Innovation and Technology Centre (SITEC))
  - Commitment to its Cooperative Council principles and understanding resident priorities through the introduction of Cooperative Neighbourhood Walkabouts and development of Neighbourhood Plans.
- 4.3 In consideration of these challenges and opportunities, Members of the Executive met in early September to discuss the future focus of a new Corporate Plan. Informing the discussion were the findings of the Resident Survey (2021), the Tenant Survey (2021), and the Cooperative Neighbourhoods Resident Proptech Survey (2023). The survey findings captured the main concerns and priorities of over 3,000+ residents. Across all 3 surveys the main priority areas were:
- tackling climate change
  - anti-social behaviour
  - provision and maintenance of new and council homes
  - delivery of good local services
- 4.4 The feedback from residents alongside conversations with Members, indicates that now is an opportune time to refine the Council's vision to ensure emphasis on the areas that matter most to residents. The proposed areas of focus for 2024-29 include:
- Prioritisation of the impact of Climate Change
  - Narrowing the focus within 'Neighbourhood' services to 3 specific areas:
    - Clean Neighbourhoods and Green Spaces
    - Community Safety
    - Culture and Leisure
  - Building on the success of Stevenage Works by recognising the importance of 'Enterprise & Skills' and providing opportunities for local people and businesses under the 'Transforming Our Town' programme
  - Highlighting the significant investment in new homes and social housing by clarifying the 2 key housing focus areas:
    - new home provision
    - maintenance of good quality social housing
  - Introducing 3 cross cutting themes which are applicable to the delivery of all 5 strategic priorities – Equality, Diversity & Inclusion; Health & Wellbeing; Technology.
- 4.5 Internally, the Council is striving to prioritise effective delivery of services in a challenging financial environment. This means using reduced resources to achieve the outcomes that matter most. Members and officers continue to work together through the 'Transformation' programme of work to introduce efficiencies that will provide a better service for residents and meet saving commitments. This is coupled with a need to remain transparent about the financial realities set out in section 4.2. The Council's ability to remain financially resilient and continue to effectively deliver the services that residents want is represented in the strategic

priority 'Balancing the Budget' and underpins successful delivery of the proposed strategic priorities for the next 5 years.

- 4.6 Appendix A sets out the five strategic priorities of the proposed 'Making Stevenage Even Better' model, which aims to deliver improved outcomes and real change for Stevenage residents. The changes within the new Corporate Plan seek to build on the FTFC programme of work, and the long-term objectives of existing FTFC programmes will remain. The performance and quality of each programme will continue to be monitored as part of robust governance and corporate performance arrangements, including the quarterly performance reporting of milestones and measures to the Executive, and the regular review of governance actions and risks as part of the wider performance framework.
- 4.7 The 'Making Stevenage Even Better' Corporate Plan will articulate to the public our key priorities and objectives over the next five years. It operates as the strategic policy framework for the Council ensuring that services consider the Council's key priorities when undertaking planning and resource allocation. It has been produced as a short, easy-to-read, public document which seeks to involve as many stakeholders as possible and help support the Council's intention to obtain meaningful feedback as part of formal consultation activities. Presenting the model in this format will help encourage discussion and debate as part of the Council's commitment to its Cooperative Council ambitions to deliver a 'co-produced' document that has involved residents, the local voluntary sector, partners and business.
- 4.8 A detailed Plan on a Page (PoaP) will be developed to sit alongside the one-page model. This will be a short plan articulating clearly to the public the 'Making Stevenage Even Better' top 10-15 key outcomes against each of the 5 strategic priorities. The PoaP will set out to residents where the Council will focus improvement efforts each year over the next five years. These outcomes will be supported by key corporate performance targets, indicators and milestones to ensure performance can be monitored on delivery.
- 4.9 Following agreement by the Executive, the Making Stevenage Even Better PoaP will be sent out for a short 6-week consultation with residents, local community groups, partners, businesses, Members and staff. The survey will be circulated via a social media campaign, the Council's enewsletter to residents, an article in the Chronicle and posters on Neighbourhood Notice Boards. It is not envisaged that this will be a large-scale consultation exercise as the Council has already carried out extensive consultation on the key priorities as set out in section 4.3. As a Budget and Policy Framework item the draft will also be formally submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October. The final version of the Corporate Plan will be presented at Full Council alongside the Budget in February 2024.

## **5 IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Financial Implications**

- 5.1.1 The Council is in the process of refocusing resources to support the priorities outlined in the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan through the budgetary cycle for 2024/25. Any additional resources required to support the

programme over and above that identified will be reflected as part of the financial planning and budget setting process for both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account.

### **5.1.2 Legal Implications**

5.1.3 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

## **5.2 Risk Implications**

5.2.1 The risks associated with individual service areas and objectives will need to be considered through normal service planning processes.

5.2.2 A strategic risk register has been developed for the Making Stevenage Even Better programme to ensure risk is effectively managed across the programme. It will be monitored by the strategic Programme Board on a quarterly basis.

## **5.3 Policy and Service Delivery Implications**

5.3.1 The Corporate Plan is the keystone in the Council's policy framework. It sets out the Council's strategic priorities and informs the corporate improvement and change programme.

5.3.2 The Corporate Plan impacts on all Council services, and this will be reflected in all Business Unit Service Plans for 2024/25.

## **5.4 Equalities Implications**

5.4.1 All projects and activities leading to policy or service change in fulfillment of the strategic priorities within the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan will be assessed through the Council's Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) process.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Executive Report: [Future Town Future Council](#)

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A - Draft Corporate Plan - Making Stevenage Even Better**

# MAKING STEVENAGE EVEN BETTER 2024-2029

STEVENAGE BETTER

# APPENDIX A

Our Values



Our values are underpinned by our commitment to the Cooperative Council principles

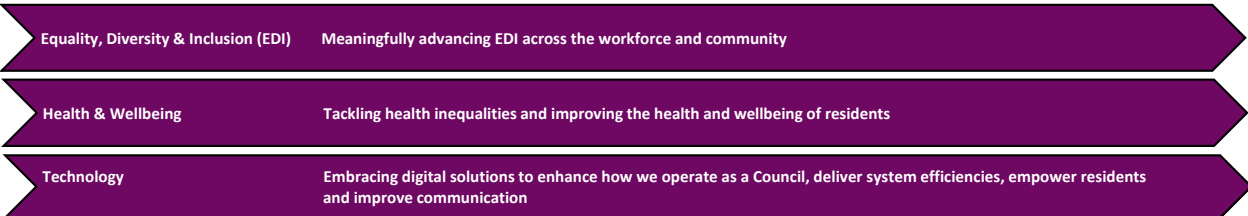


Priorities

	Transforming Our Town		More Social, Affordable & Good Quality Homes		Thriving Neighbourhoods			Tackling Climate Change	Balancing the Budget
	Regeneration	Enterprise & Skills	Building New & Sustainable Homes	Maintaining Good Quality Homes	Clean Neighbourhoods and Green Spaces	Community Safety	Culture & Leisure		
Focus	Reinvigorate the town centre and surrounding areas through a 20-year regeneration programme worth £1bn	Develop the local economy through access to skills and educational opportunities for residents	Build more social and affordable homes that fulfill our climate change sustainability commitments	Fulfill the Quality Housing 5 star programme principles across all housing provision	Ensure Neighbourhoods are clean and maintained so that residents can be proud of where they live	Provide Safer Communities where crime and ASB are reduced through effective partnership working	Promote a creative environment which underpins the fulfillment of our cultural ambitions	Cut our own emissions to net zero and support business and residents to do the same by 2030	Ensure sufficient resources are available to deliver on the Council's priorities while remaining resilient to the impact of increasing financial pressures
Outcomes (what we want to achieve)	Delivery of SG1 (e.g. Queens way North, Danestrete etc)	Residents provided with improved access to STEM opportunities through UKSPF Programme	Provide 529 more new social and affordable homes by 2029/30	Deliver a responsive repairs service which is considered excellent by tenants	Progression of the Garage Improvement Programme	SoSafe Community Safety Action Plan implemented	Leisure Hub and Museum programme of activities developed and	Increase proportion of domestic and trade waste that is recycled / not sent to landfill	Complete review of Cooperative & Commercial Insourcing Strategy
	Delivery of Towns Fund Projects (e.g. Science Tech & Innovation, GW Road, Pedestrian & Cycling Connectivity)	Small businesses provided access to training and support initiatives through effective partnership arrangements (e.g. WENTA)	Ensure all new social and affordable homes fulfill climate change and sustainability standards	Compliance with Building and Fire Safety regulations	Cooperative Neighbourhood Plans established for each neighbourhood		Arts & Heritage Trail established	Corporate Pathway to Net Zero - Vehicle and Fuels implemented	Deliver saving efficiencies as part of Transformation e.g. new payments programme
			Tenants are involved in decisions about housing and are given the opportunity to contribute meaningfully				Corporate Pathway to Net Zero - Building & Assets implemented		
			Preparation and implementation in response to new RSH Consumer Standards				Neighbourhood Green Plans implemented		
							Biodiversity Action Plan (Green Volunteers, Community Orchards etc.) implemented		
								HCCSP Behaviour Action Plan - Encourage residents to make changes to contribute to net zero 2030	

Page 179

Cross Cutting Themes



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**Meeting** EXECUTIVE

**Portfolio Area** Resources and Transformation

**Date** 12 October 2023

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Senior Leadership Team



## CO-OPERATIVE COMMERCIAL AND INSOURCING STRATEGY 2023-2026

### KEY DECISION

#### 1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report seeks the approval of the Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy 2023-2026 and the approval of Fees and Charges 2024-25 for the General Fund.
- 1.2 The Council recognises that it needs to operate commercially and transform how services are structured and provided in order to ensure the continued delivery of the Council's diverse range of services. There is the need to be prudent and efficient whilst being 'commercial with a conscience' in order to generate income, manage costs and provide funding to support vital services.
- 1.3 The strategy outlines the Council's approach to operating commercially. This will be achieved through maximising opportunities to insource services, the delivery of business process improvements and the generation of new or enhanced sources of revenue. The commercial culture across the organisation will continue to be developed, to ensure that staff are equipped with the right skills to deliver.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy for 2023-2026, as appended to this report as Appendix A, be approved and reviewed on an annual basis (together with relevant Appendices shown in Part II of this agenda).
- 2.2 That Fees and Charges 2024-25 for the General Fund, as shown at Appendix B, be approved.
- 2.3 That the Strategic Director (CF) be given delegated authority to approve any final changes required to the Strategy, following consultation with the Executive Member for Resources and Transformation.

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Local government has been facing a challenging financial position after a decade of central government funding cuts. These pressures have been heightened by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and increasing inflationary pressures. The cost-of-living crisis has driven up demand for services. These impacts have resulted in the Council having to find cumulative savings of £11Million since 2010/11. Therefore, the focus on financial security is more important than ever to support a strong position for the town and the Council.
- 3.2 The Council will continue to assess services to understand how they can deliver savings and generate revenue. It recognises that continuing to do this will help to secure the future delivery of sustainable services for the community and will deliver commercial activity in line with its objectives around 'commercial with a conscience.'

## **4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS**

- 4.1 The Council has a savings target for the General Fund of £1.23Million in 2024/25 and an additional £1Million per year in future years as per the latest Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) approved at the September 2023 Executive.
- 4.2 The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) also requires savings to meet the cost of those services, and this will be set out as part of the HRA Business Plan to be reported to the November 2023 Executive.
- 4.3 Commercialisation and fees and charges are essential tools in addressing future budget gaps and mitigating pressures. In some cases, fees and charges from one service area support other Council services. There is the need to generate sustainable new income streams, which are built into the Council's MTFS to reduce the likelihood of having to reduce or cut services.
- 4.4 Members should note that although inflation added an additional £2Million of pressure to Council budgets in 2023/24, the majority of fees

and charges for 2023/24 were set between 5-8%, below the rate of inflation (10.3% in January 2023).

4.5 Looking to 2024/25, the Council will continue to incur increased running and resource costs and has considered each area of fees and charges on a case-by-case basis. The Council's Financial Security Group (CFSG), a cross party group of Members, met on 30th August 2023 to review proposals for Fees and Charges for the General Fund 2024-25.

4.6 Increases to fees and charges, detailed in Appendix B, are recommended to meet the Balancing the Budget target. All fees and charges were approved by the majority of Members (with the exception of the planning fees referenced in 5.2.1 which were revised after the meeting of the CFSG); in twenty-eight out of thirty-five categories the fees were approved unanimously. Based on the majority of CFSG Members voting to approve the fees and charges proposed, they are recommended to the Executive to approve.

Summary of CFSG responses where fees were not agreed unanimously

Fee	Number of Members that agreed	Number of Members that disagreed
New town long stay fees average increase 9.26%	4	1
Railways Monday-Saturday 6-24 hours (proposed new time band) from £10.00 to £11.00	4	1
Church Lane North (Saturday 4pm-Monday 6am) from free to £1.00	4	1
On street parking town centre average increase 9.85%	4	1
Street naming/numbering average increase 9.85%	4	1
Local land charges no increase on LLC1, average increase on all others of 15%	4	1
Cemeteries fees increase by average 11.57%	4	1

4.7 The Council's 'Balancing the Budget' priority has four work streams to achieve financial stability for the Council so that it maintains a prudent level of balances, while at the same time being able to deliver on Future

Town Future Council (FTFC) aims, including regeneration of the town centre, housing delivery and co-operative neighbourhood management. The figure below shows the connection between the Council's Financial Security priority and targeted commercial activity. The graphic below sets out the process.



- 4.8 This approach will support services in reducing the cost of delivery and where possible, enable them to achieve break even positions where appropriate. The Council will continue to optimise resources, will actively seek new commercial opportunities and will review existing investments with a view to maximising the commercial return from them, in order to support the Council's wider services.
- 4.9 The Council will ensure that all commercial actions and decisions are ethical in nature and have a positive impact on the community, delivering additional social value and contributing to community wealth building where possible.
- 4.10 The Council operates a Commercial and Investment Working Group (CIWG), comprised of Members of the Executive. Its purpose is to enable the organisation to oversee and support the development of co-operative commercial and insourcing programmes of work. The working group provides commercially focused strategic thinking and direction and will encourage the organisation to work efficiently, achieving value for money, and delivering the Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy.
- 4.11 Members of CIWG were consulted on the Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Financial Implications**

- 5.1.1 The strategy seeks to improve the financial performance of service areas, reduce costs, and bring services back in house where possible. Where possible, low risk concessions contracts will be agreed, but on occasion commercial activity may require increased investment to make savings or generate income in the longer term. On occasions when potential 'pump prime' funds are required the necessary approval processes will be followed.
- 5.1.2 Since the meeting of the CFSG there has been a revision to the proposed planning fee for direct applications, set to rise to £70 per application, to take in increased costs for scanning, inflationary increases on banking and administrative costs and increased cost of operating and maintaining the planning system. This is reflected in Appendix B.
- 5.1.3 If the changes to fees and charges are all approved, they total an increase in budgeted income of £396,588 for 2024/25 which contributes to the funding gap as set out in the September 2023 MTFs report. Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) have been completed for changes to fees and charges across all service areas.
- 5.1.4 Following government consultation, the fee for processing planning applications is set to rise, but the regulations need to be voted on by the House of Commons and House of Lords. Once approved, the fees will increase by a prescribed rate of 25%-30% (likely to commence in April 2024) and an additional £103K income is anticipated in 2024/25.
- 5.1.5 It is recommended that Members approve that the fees and charges should increase starting from January 2024, with the exception of garages which are managed via the Northgate system and require an April 2024 start date and Markets which bill quarterly and recommend an April 2024 start date.

### **5.2 Legal Implications**

- 5.2.1 The Council has a number of options available to it when considering the best commercial approach in any given situation. These include:
- Carrying out the service as before, but in a more streamlined manner.
  - Contracting out service provision to the private or third sectors (itself or in conjunction with another authority or using an arrangement procured by another contracting authority, where appropriate).
  - Bringing services that have previously been contracted out back in-house.
  - Providing the services in partnership with another public body.

- Establishing a local authority wholly owned vehicle to take advantage of trading opportunities with individuals or the private sector.
  - Establishing joint venture vehicles in partnership with a private or public sector body, whether or not in conjunction with a services contract.
  - Ceasing to provide the service (where there is no statutory obligation to do so).
- 5.2.2 The Council will continue to consider the most appropriate route forward, utilising cost/benefit analysis and being mindful of the various legal constraints that exist in relation to each option.
- 5.2.3 The Council's powers in section 1 to do anything that individuals generally may do is subject to a restriction in section 4. This states that where, in exercise of the general power, a local authority does things for a commercial purpose, the authority must do them through a company. Although the Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy is cast in terms of a commercial approach, at this stage the strategy is motivated primarily by making best use of capacity within the services currently provided and to ensure their viability in relation to the Council's core functions. If the expansion of Council services takes on a more directly commercial character, then it may become necessary to operate through a Council company. It is therefore recommended that the performance and scale of commercial activity is subject to regular review.
- 5.2.4 It will also be necessary to ensure consider subsidy control implications and to ensure that there no negative implications on the people who are protected under the Equality Act, as per the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 5.2.5 The Council is prudent when investing and is cognisant of legal constraints. The Council has only invested £1.5Million in commercial investment assets to date. This investment took place 2018, before changes to PWLB (Public Works Loans Board) rules, when the Council purchased Essex House in Stevenage, which is rented out as office space.

### **5.3 Risk Implications**

- 5.3.1 In order to create sustainable revenue streams to help protect council services and ensure ongoing resilience, the Council must accept a degree of risk. Risk management is one of the guiding principles of the strategy. Risks across all areas are mitigated through efficient and proportional regard to governance, policy, management, processes, and systems to ensure robust decision-making, performance and success of commercial enterprises, contracts, and partnerships. The Council's approach is to pursue diverse commercial activity with risk spread across different sectors and in different areas.

## 5.4 Human Resources Implications

5.4.1 The strategy requires the Council to provide targeted training and guidance to existing staff to further develop commercial acumen. In addition, the strategy has implications for recruitment practises, performance monitoring and the potential for different pay structures moving forwards as the expectations around commercial skills and application develop further.

## APPENDICES

### Part I

- A Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy 2023-2026
- B Fees and Charges 2024/25 General Fund

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- BD1 Medium Term Financial Strategy, Revised September 2023
- BD2 Corporate Plan, Future Town, Future Council

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## APPENDIX A

### CO-OPERATIVE COMMERCIAL AND INSOURCING STRATEGY 2023-2026

#### 1.1 Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy Overview

- 1.1.1 Stevenage Borough Council recognises that it is operating in a financially challenging environment for the public sector as well as the broader national economy.
- 1.1.2 During 2020/21-2021/22 the Council weathered the operational and financial impacts of COVID which resulted in a net cost to the Council of circa £4Million.
- 1.1.3 This cost was incurred whilst the Council continued to deliver most of its services, progress with a range of major regeneration and housing development projects, improve Council homes, support neighbourhoods, and improve services for customers.
- 1.1.4 More recently, the Council's financial position has been exacerbated by the significant financial challenge of the 'Cost of Living' crisis which has resulted in a dramatic increase in inflationary costs and utility costs as set out in the September 2023 Executive Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) report.
- 1.1.5 The Council has a history of entrepreneurial activity and has been undertaking commercial activity in different forms for many years. Examples of this include the town centre regeneration partnership with MACE, Queensway redevelopment partnership with Reef, creation of a Wholly Owned Company for Housing Development and the Business and Technology Centre.
- 1.1.6 The future delivery of sustainable services is predicated on the Council's continued ability to secure additional income streams and transform how services are structured and provided. There is the need to be prudent and efficient but also to continue to use a commercial approach to generate income, manage costs and generate funding for vital services.
- 1.1.7 As a co-operative Council, the focus will continue to be on co-operative solutions and where possible work will be undertaken through the Co-operative Council's Innovation Network (CCIN).
- 1.1.8 Since the implementation of the Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy in August 2020, the Council has further adapted its culture, thinking, and ways of working.

Figure 1. Commercial activity 2020-23

<b>Garages</b>	<b>Advertising &amp; Sponsorship</b>	<b>Filming</b>	<b>Parcel lockers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in garage works</li> <li>• Changes to garage processes</li> <li>• Transition to digital lettings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income from advertising on Council assets</li> <li>• Income from events sponsorship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income from filming in Stevenage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income from parcel locker provision</li> </ul>
<b>Solar</b>	<b>Fees and Charges</b>	<b>Income streams</b>	<b>Skips</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion of a solar panel in the Multi Storey Car Park at Railway North to reduce electricity usage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commercial lead on fees and charges</li> <li>• Review of concessions and agreements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New income streams in cemeteries, planning, engineering and environmental services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch of new skips offer - domestic and commercial</li> </ul>

1.1.9 This commercial activity has required greater innovation, financial flexibility, commercial awareness, prudent risk management and the effective use of new technologies.

1.1.10 Digitisation, the key cornerstone of the transformation programme, has been used to support garage services transition to more effective ways of working. Residents can now select a garage of their choice through the transparent digital lettings process, resulting in a vastly improved customer experience and decrease in garage voids.

1.1.11 Legislation provides the Council with the power (subject to limitations) to charge for discretionary services; to trade with other public bodies and to trade with the private sector via a company. All proposals under this strategy will include a consideration of the legal implications and the most appropriate method of achieving the Council's objectives within the legislative framework.

## 1.2 Strategic Aims

1.2.1 The Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy 2023-2026 supports the overall council objectives and corporate aims by:

- Protecting services and jobs and supporting the delivery of the FTFC programme.
- Delivering efficient, effective in-house services that have the ability to be flexible and adapt.
- Moving towards becoming a financially self-sufficient council by operating in a commercial, business-like manner.
- Generating income whilst remaining focused on the core purpose of supporting and delivering with and for our communities.
- Seeking opportunities for increased wealth into the local economy (for example through welcoming filming to Stevenage).
- Developing and embedding a commercial culture and mind-set throughout the entire organisation at all levels.
- Improving commercial leadership, awareness, and competency.
- Considering appropriate trading opportunities, utilising robust business plans and financial risk assessments to ensure effective and informed decisions.

### **1.3 Rationale**

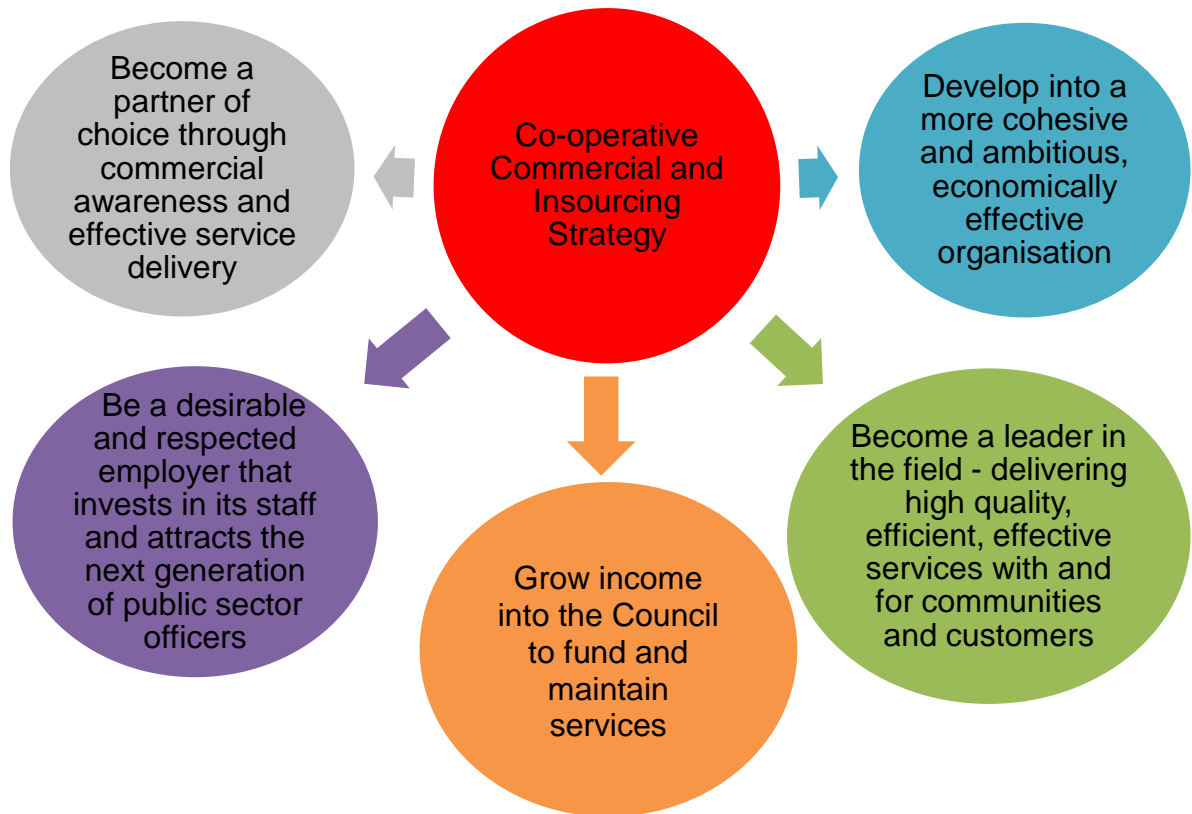
- 1.3.1 The ability to set a balanced budget and at the same time retain the same level of services has become harder due to the combined financial impacts of government grant reduction and absorbing inflation of over £12Million. As well as significant financial pressures, local authorities are operating in an environment of reducing resources, increasing customer demand for important services such as housing support and homelessness prevention and there is greater market competition for services.
- 1.3.2 The District Council's Network (DCN) commented that the 2022 finance policy statement contained good news that all councils will be guaranteed an increase of at least 3% in their spending power next year. This announcement on top of the previously announced flexibility for district councils to raise council tax by 3%, has helped a little, but still means that district councils face a real-term cuts in their spending power as inflation outstrips the new funding support. Income from fees and charges remains below pre-pandemic levels. District councils have warned that they faced a collective funding gap of at least £500Million in 2023-24, the equivalent to almost 15% of their net budget.
- 1.3.3 Commercialisation and the generation of sustainable new income streams need to continue at pace to address future budget gaps and pressures.
- 1.3.4 Given the economic uncertainty moving forwards, the Council accepts that there is the need to be flexible in approach and that some opportunities will be designed to be scalable and to grow or be expanded over a period of time in line with changing demands and markets.

## **1.4 Definition of Commercialism**

- 1.4.1 The Council defines commercialism as the ability to manage services well and efficiently and be innovative in generating funds to be able to protect vital services and deliver the best value for our communities and customers.
- 1.4.2 Commercialism does not just mean making a surplus, but also includes:
- Understanding and considering the whole life cost of policy decisions, including market impact and benefits realisation
  - Improving efficiency of service delivery; reducing costs, layers and streamlining processes
  - Using insight data and technology to help modernise services; finding innovative ways to better support residents and service users and the town
  - Maximising value for money from contractual relationships, including the consideration of insourcing services
  - Making robust decisions on a consistent basis with evidence and a sound business case
  - Considering new and innovative ways of generating income
  - Accepting some risk, and accepting that some ideas may not succeed
  - Pursuing a strategy of 'commercial with a conscience' and actively seeking social value returns from commercial activity
  - Being mindful of the need for the risks to be spread across the portfolio of opportunities and ensuring resilience when considering the exposure to costs against reward
  - Taking an investment-based approach to the use of financial resources, including assessing the return from the investment in terms of financial return, delivery of the Council's priorities and added value to our communities
  - Being honest about current performance and knowing whether services are market ready
  - Being prepared to invest now for a return in the future
  - Demonstrating that the Council is open for business and driving inward investment into the borough
- 1.4.3 This means making sound and clear decisions in using our resources, investing public funds to become more efficient and to generate income for the Council to sustain services and deliver improved services where possible.
- 1.4.4 Commercial principles can be applied to most operations and must be considered when reviewing all policy objectives and direction.

## 1.5. Outcomes

Figure 2. Key outcomes from the delivery of the Strategy



## 2.0 COMMERCIAL APPROACH TO INCOME GENERATION

### 2.1 Core Principles & Methodology

- 2.1.1 This strategy applies whenever we spend money with external suppliers, enter or manage our commercial arrangements, generate income, or make a commercial decision.
- 2.1.2 The Council has enterprising staff, partners, and members - their skills need to continue to be harnessed and developed to help achieve the commercial strategy.
- 2.1.3 The Council accepts that on occasion it may need to take some measured and considered risk to achieve its ambitions and commercial success. This means accepting that not all commercial activity will deliver the anticipated returns, and that some of that risk will be mitigated by a robust approach to diversification. This risk is also balanced with an efficient and proportional regard to governance, policy, management, processes, and systems to ensure robust decision-making, performance and success of commercial enterprises, contracts, and partnerships. This approach ensures that the Council adheres to its statutory

responsibilities and that public money continues to be appropriately invested and accounted for.

## **2.2 Organisation Wide Commercialisation Objectives**

### **2.2.1 Improving Processes and Efficiency**

- 2.2.2 The financial performance of individual service areas will continue to be reviewed to identify the level of subsidy or surplus generated, and the appropriate policy approach. The taxpayer should not be asked to pay for certain discretionary services through council subsidisation. This may result in the Council being more commercially astute, i.e., removing council subsidy and charging what it truly costs to provide a service.
- 2.2.3 Each business unit will continue to seek to enhance productivity and yield by reviewing where appropriate; fees & charges, processes, the cost of delivering services and the potential to deliver new added value services.
- 2.2.4 Fees and charges will continue to be reviewed thoroughly on an annual basis. Fees and charges support the provision of highly regarded council services and support the 'commercial with a conscience' agenda. Future considerations around fees and charges include the introduction of new premium pricing options.
- 2.2.5 The focus on fees and charges will extend to continued correspondence with the government around granting greater freedoms for local councils in setting fees and charges. Giving councils the power to set certain fees and charges at a local level and not be restricted by limits determined by the Government in areas such as parking fines and fixed penalty notice fees and fees that fall under the Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act 2005 would mean that councils would be better able to align fees and charges with the cost of running services for their communities and achieve greater financial sustainability.
- 2.2.6 Attention will also be given to tightening contract management processes across the Council. This will involve establishing robust terms and conditions during the tendering phase and ensuring that appropriate management provisions are included to plan for contract management from the outset. Clear performance frameworks will be implemented to mitigate against non-delivery and under-performance and contracts will be monitored, maintained, and adapted accordingly.
- 2.2.7 Internally, work will continue on the creation of the grant funding tracker, which will allow strategic oversight of the grant funding pipeline.

### **2.3 Income Generation Objectives**

- 2.3.1 A key focus for 2023-26 will be on the opportunity to sell commercial services externally. This will include both growing the income from

current offers (such as skips, trade waste, cemeteries) and taking new commercial offers to the market. The Council will look to enhance existing income generating services by providing commercial support in areas such as sales, marketing, and business development to ensure that the Council are able to maximise market share in that particular service area.

- 2.3.2 Where investment is required, proposals will continue to be measured against agreed investment criteria, to ensure they meet the required returns and objectives and so that public money is invested proportionately and with due regard to procurement and governance procedures.
- 2.3.3 The expansion of commercial services means that the effective collection of income will be increasingly important; attention will be given to debt management and recovery processes across the Council.
- 2.3.4 All projects will be undertaken in accordance with approved procurement and governance procedures to manage risk and ensure compliance.

## **2.4 Insourcing Objectives**

- 2.4.1 The Council will continue with its commitment to use in-house services to deliver council operations, and insourcing will be the Council's default position, other than when there is sufficient evidence that this is not an option.
- 2.4.2 During 2020-2023 services that were insourced included:
  - Meadow grass cutting
  - Window cleaning
  - Compliance contract (compliance and maintenance of 65 corporate buildings)
- 2.4.3 All services provided to, or on behalf of the Council by external suppliers or third parties will continue to be reviewed to establish if an opportunity exists to enhance service delivery or achieve better value by delivering services directly. Where possible, business units will be developed to deliver work that is currently contracted out to others.
- 2.4.4 Attention will continue to be given as to whether opportunities exist to join up work streams across the council and break down silo approaches when procuring services and managing contracts. The quarterly meeting of the Contracts and Procurement Group creates an environment where the alignment of procurement needs can be explored.

During 2020-23 examples of joined up working include:

  - Stevenage Direct Services (SDS) contract managing uniforms and cleaning products for all teams where possible
  - Repairs and Voids building materials contract being made available to contractors of the council

- Regeneration framework for building consultancy being open to other teams

2.4.5 The Insourcing Road Map 2023-2026 lists known contracts and potential insourcing opportunities and details timescales for their consideration and is regularly reviewed by the Commercial and Investment Working Group.

## 2.5 Social Value Objectives

2.5.1 All commercial projects and opportunities seek to identify social value, which includes aspects such as meeting housing needs, cultural and wellbeing benefits and enhancing local training and employment opportunities.

2.5.2 By embedding social value considerations into commercial activity, the Council supports community wealth building in Stevenage, to ensure that there is a positive impact on the local economy.

2.5.3 On occasion, this may mean that upfront costs may be higher but that the outcomes for residents and the community will be greater.

2.5.4 As part of the annual accounts process the Council submits a statement outlining the social value that has been delivered.

## 2.6 Commercial Culture Objectives

2.6.1 To enable the Council to operate in a more business-like way and to protect council services and jobs, there is a need to ensure that staff are equipped with the right skills to deliver.

2.6.2 Careful consideration has been given to creating the right environment within the organisation to nurture innovative ideas and develop them into robust project proposals.

Figure 3. Commercial culture 2020-2026





### **3.0 BUSINESS UNIT SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

3.1 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are set for business units and are reported back on a regular basis to the Commercial and Investment Working Group.

### **3.2 Commercial Services**

3.2.1 Commercial activity will focus upon:

- A reduction in garage voids
- An increase in revenue from traded services such as trade waste and skip hire
- An increase in revenue from advertising and sponsorship and filming
- The launch of new commercial services into the marketplace
- A review of the impact of EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) on the Council's income streams
- Opportunities to cross sell commercial services and increase market share
- A review of current contractual arrangements
- Fees and charges
- The reduction of debt and increased income collection across the Council in order to reduce the annual provision of bad debt

### **3.3 Commercial Property Portfolio**

3.3.1 The Commercial Strategy 2020-23 referenced the delivery of investment in commercial property primarily to deliver economic sustainability in Stevenage. However, changes to the guidance for borrowing from the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) mean that local authorities can no longer borrow from the PWLB if the primary objective is to purchase commercial property for yield. This change, coupled with the current cost of debt, means that the Council's approach to the commercial property portfolio has changed.

3.3.2 For 2023-26 the focus for the Council's commercial property portfolio, which includes 176 shops and 72 other commercial buildings (such as workshops and warehouses), is on maximising income and returns. This will take the form of good tenant selection, regular rent reviews and identification of opportunities for redevelopment, including refurbishment of and investment in existing assets where there is a compelling business case to do so. This also includes investing in buildings to ensure they comply with current energy efficiency standards.

3.3.3 The ongoing Locality Review identifies land that can be sold/disposed of to generate capital receipts and supports the sustainability of the General

Fund. The Council will continue to move towards the Corporate Landlord model approach in managing its commercial assets.

### **3.4 Finance & Treasury Management**

- 3.4.1 The Council is currently maintaining an under-borrowed position. This means that the capital borrowing need (the Capital Financing Requirement), has not been fully funded by taking loans out with the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB). Instead, the Council's reserves, balances and cash flow have been used. This strategy is prudent as investment returns are low and counterparty risk is still an issue that needs to be considered. Caution will therefore continue to be adopted with treasury operations moving forwards.
- 3.4.2 The Council does not borrow in advance of need and borrowing decisions will be based on robust business cases. All transactions will be accounted for in accordance with proper practice.

### **3.5 Housing Development**

- 3.5.1 The Council recognises the importance of affordable council housing and is mindful of the wider housing crisis which requires more private housing to be built. It recognises that the development of private housing stock can generate returns that could allow more council houses to be built. As part of the Housing Development's core remit of providing new affordable accommodation in the town, opportunities to develop private sale accommodation alongside that have been realised, with £16Million in capital receipts being achieved over the last four years. As part of its wider regeneration schemes such as at Kenilworth Close, the Housing Development team have worked to enhance the retail offer as part of the scheme proposals. Work is currently underway to market the soon to be completed new retail at the site, and the current forecasts based on feedback from the marketing agent is a potential 400% increase in rental yield in comparison to the previous units available at the site.
- 3.5.2 Alongside this, the Council has advanced the formation of a Wholly Owned Housing Company (WOC) which was established in 2021 and since then has secured the purchase of ten properties which also benefited from Central Government funding. A development opportunity for seventeen private sale houses was secured within the WOC at the Courtlands site, with building work currently underway. The aspiration is that this will provide a revenue income of over £1Million to the Council. The WOC has also established a Service Level Agreement with the Council which helps to maximise insourcing opportunities as they arise through development.
- 3.5.3 The Housing Development service has also worked to deliver new bespoke supported accommodation units across the town helping to reduce the Council's reliance on Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation to meet this demand. By delivering this type of home, not only does it provide accommodation from which residents are better

able to access support, it also reduces the Council's cost burden, with rental income from these new units being retained by the Council. To date, the Council has delivered in excess of seventy new units of this type of accommodation and has been successful in drawing down over £1.3Million in grant funding to support this.

- 3.5.4 During 2023-26, the Council will continue to deliver low risk, high return private sale opportunities to continue to cross subsidise affordable accommodation within the town. Capital funding remains available to the WOC under the existing approved Business Plan, and opportunities for development within the WOC will be assessed as and when they arise.

### **3.6 Commercial and Net Zero Targets**

- 3.6.1 Since September 2020, the Council has had a Climate Change Strategy and has committed to achieving net zero by 2030.

- 3.6.2 The Council has already combined the commercial and green agendas through:

- The installation of a solar panel in the Railway North Multi-Storey Car Park which reduces electricity usage
- The current trialling of new solar lighting in streetlamps with a view to generating efficiencies
- The current energy audits which aim to reduce carbon emissions and improve cost effectiveness

- 3.6.3 Work will continue to align these approaches, with particular focus upon the climate change element of commercial investments. This may include:

- The creation of an investment strategy that targets low carbon areas and equally restricts investment in high carbon areas
- Investments that facilitate energy generation on council assets
- Carbon offsetting on council land
- Carbon assessments for all investments in commercial property from 2024 onwards to ensure an understanding of the carbon impact
- An understanding of the carbon footprint of the Council's traded services

## **4.0 GOVERNANCE**

- 4.1 All officers and Members are encouraged to share their ideas through the Commercial and Investment Executive Working Group (CIWG). This forum is made up of Executive member representatives and provides a forum to consider and debate broader income generation ideas.

- 4.2 The CIWG provides a mechanism for ideas within internal services and those with external partners and customers to be discussed before progressing down the formal route for approval (such as through the

Executive). Quarterly commercial Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on commercial activity are also brought to the group for review. The CIWG's terms of reference define the extent of its remit.

- 4.3 One of the guiding principles of the Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy is risk management. Risks are managed in line with the principles of the Council's risk management procedures, commercialisation is identified on the Strategic Risk Register and all key risks associated with the commercialisation and insourcing agenda across the organisation are identified on business unit or project risk registers as appropriate.

## 5.0 INVESTMENT CRITERIA

- 5.1.1 In the longer term, when appropriate, investments will ideally meet the target of a six (6%) per cent gross rate of return (yield). However, there is some flexibility and target returns lower than 6% will be considered on a case-by-case basis depending on borrowing and investment rates and the calculated level of associated risk.

Figure 4. Factors influencing the viability of investment

Factors	Considerations
Known costs	
Interest on the loan	This is based on the available loan options available at the point of investment/purchase
Minimum Revenue Provision (the minimum amount that must be charged to an authority's revenue account each year for the financing of capital expenditure)	This calculation is based on the life of the asset and will vary accordingly. On an investment with a 50-year life (which sits at the upper limit of investment life), MRP would equate to an additional 2% per year*
Other associated costs	
Repair costs	Cost of materials, inflationary impact, the robustness of supply chains
Energy efficiency improvements	Compliance with new regulations approved by government to ensure all premises are energy efficient
Bad debt provision for non-payment of rent	The Council will need to provide a provision for potential bad debts as part of the closure of the account each year, based on the outstanding debts

Void property charges	Inclusive of empty property business rates
The cost of rent reviews	Where rent free periods may be given to attract tenants, or the time taken searching for a new tenant if a property becomes vacant

\* The method of calculating the MRP can be changed by the Council which may reduce MRP costs in the early years of investment, whilst increasing in the latter years. This could be done with long leases with guaranteed rent increases at fixed points during the lease. However, overall, the total MRP payable over the length of the loan will still average 2% per annum.

## 5.2 Risk Profile

5.2.1 The Council will focus on resilience and where possible will conduct commercial activity that has minimal upfront cost (such as for example through the procurement of concessions contracts). When seeking investment, consideration will need to be given to whether exposure to further debt will outweigh potential reward.

Figure 5. Commercial risk mitigations

Risk Area	Risk Mitigation	Likelihood	Impact
Commercial activity does not perform against the business case	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thorough research,</li> <li>• Understanding the market/demand</li> <li>• Horizon scanning</li> <li>• Scrutiny by CIWG</li> <li>• Review options,</li> <li>• Diversify the portfolio</li> <li>• Lessons learnt</li> </ul>	Medium	Medium
A contract under-performs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Robust terms and conditions</li> <li>• Appropriate contract management provision</li> <li>• Performance management frameworks</li> <li>• Lessons learnt</li> </ul>	Medium	Medium
Insufficient knowledge held in-house	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted learning and development</li> <li>• Buy-in specialist resource</li> </ul>	Medium	Low

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Service	Fees and Charges for 2024/25	2023/24 FEE	2024/25 Proposed FEE	Increase £	% Increase	Budget Increase (from fee proposals)
<b>Car Parks</b>						
<b>New Town:</b>	<b>7am-7pm (6am-7pm at St Georges only) :</b>					
	Mon-Saturday up to 30 Mins (St Georges & Westgate only)	£1.00	£1.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Mon-Saturday up to 1 hour	£2.00	£2.10	£0.10	5.00%	
	Mon-Saturday up to 2 hours	£3.00	£3.20	£0.20	6.67%	
<b>Short Stay</b> (Westgate/Forum/St G)	Mon-Saturday up to 3 hours	£4.00	£4.30	£0.30	7.50%	
	Mon-Saturday up to 5 Hours	£5.00	£5.40	£0.40	8.00%	
	Mon-Saturday Over 5 Hours (St Georges)	£6.00	£6.50	£0.50	8.33%	
	Mon-Saturday Over 5 Hours (Forum/Westgate)	£9.00	£6.50	£-2.50	-27.78%	
	Sunday	£2.50	£2.50	£0.00	0.00%	
	Night Parking 7pm to 7am (6am for St G)	£2.00	£2.50	£0.50	25.00%	
						<b>£39,584</b>
<b>Long stay</b>	Mon-Fri entry before 8.30am to 6pm	£9.00	£9.50	£0.50	5.56%	
Page 203 (Swingate/Daneshill/Southgate)	Mon-Fri entry after 8.30am to 6pm	£6.00	£6.50	£0.50	8.33%	
	Mon-Sat 6am-7pm (Southgate Only)	£6.00	£6.50	£0.50	8.33%	
	Saturday 6am - 6pm	£6.00	£6.50	£0.50	8.33%	
	Sunday	£2.50	£2.50	£0.00	0.00%	
	Night Parking (7pm to 6am or 6pm - 6am)	£2.00	£2.50	£0.50	25.00%	
<b>Total Long Stay</b>						<b>£20,390</b>
Railways	Mon-Sat up to 6 hours		£7.00	£7.00	n/a	
	Mon- Sat 6-24 hours (Proposed new time band)	£10.00	£11.00	£1.00	10.00%	
Railways						
Railways	Sunday	£7.50	£4.00	£-3.50	-46.67%	
<b>Total Railways</b>						<b>£47,825</b>
Season Tickets	New Town (price per month)	£94.50	£98.00	£3.50	3.70%	
	Blue Badge Holders (Season Ticket, price per Annum)	£52.50	£54.50	£2.00	3.81%	
	Rail (price per month)	£169.00	£173.00	£4.00	2.37%	
<b>Season Tickets SubTotal</b>						<b>£5,051.00</b>
<b>New Town GRAND TOTAL</b>						
<b>Old Town:</b>						
<b>Primett Rd North</b>	<b>Monday - Saturday 0600-1600 hours</b>					
	up to one hour	£1.30	£1.30	£0.00	0.00%	
	up to two hours	£1.90	£1.90	£0.00	0.00%	
	up to three hours	£2.60	£2.60	£0.00	0.00%	
	Up to five hours	£5.40	£3.50	£-1.90	-35.19%	
	More than five hours	£8.00	£3.50	£-4.50	-56.25%	
	Evenings (Mon-Sat) (4pm to 6am)	£0.50	£1.00	£0.50	100.00%	

Service	Fees and Charges for 2024/25	2023/24 FEE	2024/25 Proposed FEE	Increase £	% Increase	Budget Increase (from fee proposals)
Primett Rd South	Sundays (6am-Mon 6am)	£0.50	£1.00	£0.50	100.00%	
	<b>Monday-Friday</b>					
	0600-1600hrs	£3.20	£3.50	£0.30	9.37%	
	1600-0600hrs	£0.50	£1.00	£0.50	100.00%	
	<b>Saturday 0600-1600:</b>					
	up to one hour	£1.30	£1.30	£0.00	0.00%	
Church Lane North	up to two hours	£1.90	£1.90	£0.00	0.00%	
	up to three hours	£2.60	£2.60	£0.00	0.00%	
	More than three hours	£3.20	£3.50	£0.30	9.37%	
	<b>Saturday 4pm-Monday 6am</b>	£0.50	£1.00	£0.50	100.00%	
	<b>Mon-Sat 0600-1600hrs</b>					
	up to one hour	£1.30	£1.30	£0.00	0.00%	
	up to two hours	£1.90	£1.90	£0.00	0.00%	
	up to three hours	£2.60	£2.60	£0.00	0.00%	
	More than three hours	£3.20	£3.50	£0.30	9.37%	
	<b>Saturday 4pm-Monday 6am</b>	Free	£1.00	£1.00	new	
Season Tickets	Old Town (price per month)	£53.00	£55.00	£2.00	3.77%	
Old Town GRAND TOTAL						£7,261
<b>TOTAL "All Off Street Car Parks"</b>						<b>£120,111</b>

Page 2



Service	Fees and Charges for 2024/25	2023/24 FEE	2024/25 Proposed FEE	Increase £	% Increase	Budget Increase (from fee proposals)
<b>On Street Parking</b>						
<b>Town Centre</b>	up to 30 mins	£1.00	£1.10	£0.10	10.00%	
	Up to 1 Hour	£2.00	£2.20	£0.20	10.00%	
	Up to 2 Hours	£3.00	£3.30	£0.30	10.00%	
	Up to 3 Hours	£4.00	£4.40	£0.40	10.00%	
	Up to 4 Hours	£5.00	£5.50	£0.50	10.00%	
	Up to 5 Hours	£11.00	£6.60	-\$4.40	-40.00%	
	Over 5 hours	£11.00	£12.00	£1.00	9.09%	
<b>Corey's Mill Lane</b>	<b>up to 1 hr £1.50 up to 2 hrs £2.50 up to 3 hrs (max stay) £4.00 (correct for 22/23 Fin year)</b>	No change	£2 / £3 / £4.50	£0.50	20.00%	£5,815
<b>On Street Parking Total</b>						<b>£59,920</b>
<b>Street Naming/Numbering</b>						
Page 205 Various Options, some examples shown here	First Dwelling Numbering	£118.00	£130.00	£12.00	10.17%	
	Next ten dwellings (per dwelling)	£63.00	£68.00	£5.00	7.94%	
	Naming of new street	£240.00	£270.00	£30.00	12.50%	
	Commercial numbering first unit	£312.00	£340.00	£28.00	8.97%	
	Commercial numbering further units	£155.00	£170.00	£15.00	9.68%	
<b>External Works (e.g. Other LAs)</b>						<b>£1,030</b>
Examples of Hourly Charge out rate for staff time (VAT to be added)	Engineering Services Manager	£70.75	£77.00	£6.25	8.83%	
	Principal Engineer	£65.50	£71.00	£5.50	8.40%	
	Traffic & Parking Enforcement Manager	£61.50	£67.00	£5.50	8.94%	
	Engineer	£48.50	£53.00	£4.50	9.28%	
	Inspector	£46.00	£50.00	£4.00	8.70%	
<b>Town Centre Charges</b>						<b>£126</b>
<b>Street Hoarding Licences</b>	Hoarding/Scaffold Licence (per week/100m run) <b>(changing to per 50m from 22/23)</b>	£50.00	£55.00	£5.00	10.00%	
	Application Fee	£100.00	£100.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Crane Licence	£2,350.00	£2,500.00	£150.00	6.38%	
	Skip Licence (per fortnight)	£44.00	£48.00	£4.00	9.09%	
<b>Licensing (Hoardings)</b>						<b>£892</b>
Parking Permits (e.g. Burymead) (selected example)	H Bar Marking Application fee	£33.00	£35.00	£2.00	6.06%	
	H Bar Marking Fee	£95.00	£100.00	£5.00	5.26%	
	Parking Bay Suspension (5 bays/wk)	n/a	£210.00			
	Suspension Application Fee	£120.00	£125.00	£5.00	4.17%	
	Parking Bay Suspension (per additional bay)	£20.00	£22	£2.00	10.00%	
	First Permit	£56.00	£56.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Second Permit	£82.00	£82.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Third Permit	£108.00	£108.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Fourth Permit	£134.00	£134.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	<b>£1,361</b>					

Service	Fees and Charges for 2024/25	2023/24 FEE	2024/25 Proposed FEE	Increase £	% Increase	Budget Increase (from fee proposals)
charges shown)	20 visitor vouchers	£15.00	£15.00	£0.00	0.00%	£741
<b>Garages:</b>						
Prices shown are "NET" of VAT. Housing Tenants generally do not pay VAT but other customers do pay VAT, meaning the actual weekly increase for a Category A garage would be 60p. Around 2/3rd of all customers do pay VAT.	Standard Garage (Category A)	£13.25	£13.90	£0.65	4.91%	
	Standard Garage (Category B)	£12.85	£13.10	£0.25	1.95%	
	Standard Garage (Category C)	£12.00	£12.30	£0.30	2.50%	
	Road Facing Garages	£15.10	£15.90	£0.80	5.30%	
	Bubble	£5.00	£5.50	£0.50	10.00%	
	Large A	£13.60	£14.40	£0.80	5.88%	
	Large B	£13.25	£14.00	£0.75	5.66%	
	Large Wide A	£13.82	£14.50	£0.68	4.92%	
	Large Wide B	£13.50	£14.20	£0.70	5.19%	
	Premium Garage	£16.50	£17.25	£0.75	4.55%	
	Premium Wide	£22.80	£23.75	£0.95	4.17%	
	Premium Road facing	£18.80	£19.50	£0.70	3.72%	
	Charitable rate	£3.00	£3.10	£0.10	3.33%	
	Page 206  <b>Commercial</b>	Standard Commercial	£16.70	£17.50	£0.80	4.79%
Commercial Large 1		£23.40	£24.50	£1.10	4.70%	
Commercial Large 1 Road Facing		£23.45	£25.00	£1.55	6.61%	
Commercial Large 2		£19.45	£20.50	£1.05	5.40%	
Commercial Large 2 Road Facing		£20.20	£21.25	£1.05	5.20%	
Commercial 3		£74.00	£76.00	£2.00	2.70%	
<b>Garages Total</b>						£152,500
<b>Markets: Indoor market stall rents variable based on size</b>		Various increased by 5%	Various	Various	2.25%	£7,020
<b>Bulky Waste:</b>						
	3 Items	£48.00	£48.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	6 Items	£78.00	£78.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	7 Items	£88.00	£88.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	8 Items	£97.00	£97.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	9 Items	£106.00	£106.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	10 Items	£115.00	£115.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Cancellation Fee	£11.00	£12.00	£1.00	9.09%	
<b>Bulky Waste Total</b>						£0
<b>Trade Refuse:</b>						
	Refuse 1100L bin, weekly collection - Inside Stevenage	£23.25	£23.25	£0.00	0.00%	
	Refuse 1100L bin, weekly collection, Outside Stevenage	£24.70	£24.70	£0.00	0.00%	
	Paper/Cardboard (Fibre) 1100L bin, fortnightly collection - Inside Stevenage	£12.35	£12.35	£0.00	0.00%	
	Paper/Cardboard (Fibre) 1100L bin, fortnightly collection Inside Stevenage - Outside Stevenage	£13.10	£13.10	£0.00	0.00%	

Service	Fees and Charges for 2024/25	2023/24 FEE	2024/25 Proposed FEE	Increase £	% Increase	Budget Increase (from fee proposals)
<b>Trade Refuse:</b>						£0
	25 TRADE SACKS	£72.52	£72.52	£0.00	0.00%	
	50 TRADE SACKS	£135.80	£135.80	£0.00	0.00%	
	75 TRADE SACKS	£186.72	£186.72	£0.00	0.00%	
	100 TRADE SACKS	£244.45	£244.45	£0.00	0.00%	
	125 TRADE SACKS	£299.63	£299.63	£0.00	0.00%	
	150 TRADE SACKS	£360.70	£360.70	£0.00	0.00%	
	200 TRADE SACKS	£453.49	£453.49	£0.00	0.00%	
	300 TRADE SACKS	£640.21	£640.21	£0.00	0.00%	
	500 TRADESACKS	£1,034.45	£1,034.45	£0.00	0.00%	
	REF240	£9.35	£9.35	£0.00	0.00%	
	REF330	£9.35	£9.35	£0.00	0.00%	
	REF360	£9.35	£9.35	£0.00	0.00%	
	REF660	£16.86	£16.86	£0.00	0.00%	
	REF1100	£23.25	£23.25	£0.00	0.00%	
	REF660 Schools	£14.48	£14.48	£0.00	0.00%	
	REF1100 Schools	£18.00	£18.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	REC240 Plastic	£7.01	£7.01	£0.00	0.00%	
	REC240 Glass	£7.01	£7.01	£0.00	0.00%	
	REC240 Paper	£7.01	£7.01	£0.00	0.00%	
	REC360 Plastic	£8.83	£8.83	£0.00	0.00%	
	REC360 Glass	£8.83	£8.83	£0.00	0.00%	
	REC360 Paper	£8.83	£8.83	£0.00	0.00%	
	REC660 Paper	£11.39	£11.39	£0.00	0.00%	
	REC1100 Paper	£12.38	£12.38	£0.00	0.00%	
<b>Skips:</b>	Increase in fees to cover additional increase in disposal costs (example of pricing shown 6yard skip)				0.00%	£0
Material	Skip Size					
Wood	4 yard	£205.00	£205.00	£0.00	0.00%	
General waste	4 yard	£250.00	£250.00	£0.00	0.00%	
Soil	4 yard	£212.00	£212.00	£0.00	0.00%	
Glass, Metal, Plastic	4 yard	£150.00	£150.00	£0.00	0.00%	
Wood	6 yard	£255.00	£255.00	£0.00	0.00%	
General waste	6 yard	£325.00	£325.00	£0.00	0.00%	
Soil	6 yard	£268.00	£268.00	£0.00	0.00%	
Glass, Metal, Plastic	6 yard	£185.00	£185.00	£0.00	0.00%	£0
<b>Cemeteries:</b>						
	Burials -5' single	£860.00	£880.00	£20.00	2.33%	
	Burials - 6' double	£1,050.00	£1,150.00	£100.00	9.52%	
	Burials - 8' - treble	£1,188.00	£1,500.00	£312.00	26.26%	
	Natural Burial - Grant of Rights	£1,240.00	£1,242.00	£2.00	0.16%	

Service	Fees and Charges for 2024/25	2023/24 FEE	2024/25 Proposed FEE	Increase £	% Increase	Budget Increase (from fee proposals)
Purchase of Grant of Exclusive Rights to Grave/Plot	Natural Burial - 5' single	£860.00	£880.00	£20.00	2.33%	
	Natural Burial - Ashes (single)	£355.00	£356.00	£1.00	0.28%	
	Natural Burial - Ashes (double)	£515.00	£518.00	£3.00	0.58%	
Cremated Remains - Sanctum	Child - 50yrs	£275.00	£290.00	£15.00	5.45%	
	Adult - 50yrs	£1,265.00	£1,350.00	£85.00	6.72%	
	Garden of Rest	£385.00	£385.00	£0.00	0.00%	
Cremated Remains	Grant Transfer	£92.00	£100.00	£8.00	8.70%	
	Sanctum Vault - Almonds - 1 internment (25yr)	£1,150.00	£1,150.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Sanctum Vault - 2nd Internment	£300.00	£300.00	£0.00	0.00%	
Cremated Remains - Double Casket	Lease Renewal	£1,150.00	£1,150.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Lease Transfer	£82.00	£87.00	£5.00	6.10%	
	Grave Space	£330.00	£330.00	£0.00	0.00%	
Saturday Internments	Garden of Rest	£330.00	£330.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Lawn Birches (scattering)	£75.00	£80.00	£5.00	6.67%	
	Rose Gardens	£620.00	£770.00	£150.00	24.19%	
Memorials	Grave Space	£480.00	£480.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Garden of Rest	£480.00	£480.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Rose Gardens	£925.00	£1,079.00	£154.00	16.65%	
Commemorative Information	Chapel Hire	£135.00	£160.00	£25.00	18.52%	
	Burials	£700.00	£1,400.00	£700.00	100.00%	
	Ashes	£215.00	£430.00	£215.00	100.00%	
Cemeteries Total	Headstone	£250.00	£250.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Memorial (Garden of Rest)	£235.00	£235.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Additional Inscription	£85.00	£85.00	£0.00	0.00%	
Parks and Open Spaces:	Memorial Wall / Paving - renewal fee for 5 yr	£47.00	£55.00	£8.00	17.02%	
	Memorial Wall / Paving	£47.00	£55.00	£8.00	17.02%	
	Book of Remembrance - per entry	£65.00	£75.00	£10.00	15.38%	
Football	Book of Remembrance - each line of verse to a maximum of 4 verses	£38.00	£40.00	£2.00	5.26%	
	Plaques for Tree & Shrubs	£125.00	£125.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Bench Plaques (10yr)	£500.00	£500.00	£0.00	0.00%	
Pavilions	Exhumations - Cremated Remains	£432.00	£500.00	£68.00	15.74%	
	<b>Cemeteries Total</b>					<b>£18,602</b>
	<b>Parks and Open Spaces:</b>					
Football	Senior Pitches (with facilities)	£84.30	£84.30	£0.00	0.00%	
	Senior Pitches (No facilities)	£58.30	£58.30	£0.00	0.00%	
	Junior / 9 vs 9 (with facilities)	£34.83	£34.83	£0.00	0.00%	
Pavilions	Junior / 9 vs 9 (no facilities)	£27.86	£27.86	£0.00	0.00%	
	5 vs 5 / 7 vs 7 (no facilities)	£24.36	£24.36	£0.00	0.00%	
	St Nicholas (p/h)	£60.47	£64.10	£3.63	6.00%	
Pavilions	St Nicholas Meeting Room (p/h)	£18.17	£19.26	£1.09	6.00%	
	Peartee & Ridlins Pavilion (p/h)	£30.32	£32.14	£1.82	6.00%	

**FEES AND CHARGES -RECOMMENDED FEE INCREASES FOR 2024/25**      **APPENDIX B FEES AND CHARGES**

Service	Fees and Charges for 2024/25	2023/24 FEE	2024/25 Proposed FEE	Increase £	% Increase	Budget Increase (from fee proposals)
Ridlins Athletics Track Club	Promo 'Promo1'	£51.22	£54.30	£3.08	6.01%	
	Promo 'Club'	£43.22	£45.80	£2.58	5.97%	
Competition / Event	under 200	£63.45	£67.00	£3.55	5.59%	
	over 200 people	£78.73	£83.00	£4.27	5.42%	
	Additional Extra Toilet hire (per Toilet, per day)	£150.00	£150.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Stevenage School Sports Day	£59.10	£62.50	£3.40	5.75%	
Bowls Rink Hire		£1,410.00	£1,494.00	£84.00	5.96%	
<b>OUTDOOR FITNESS LICENCE (cost p.a)</b>	Fitness Licence 1 year	£100.00	£100.00	£0.00	0.00%	£0
<b>Parks and Open Spaces Total</b>						<b>£4,494</b>
Allotments:	Price per M <sup>2</sup> per year	£0.82	£0.87	£0.05	6.10%	
	100M <sup>2</sup> per year	£82.00	£87.00	£5.00	6.10%	
	250M <sup>2</sup> per year	£205.00	£217.50	£12.50	6.10%	
<b>NEW CHARGE FOR Allotment Setup Admin Fee</b>		<b>£100.00</b>	<b>£15.00</b>	<b>new</b>	<b>new</b>	<b>£2,100</b>
<b>Allotments Total</b>						<b>£4,697</b>

Page 209



Service	Fees and Charges for 2024/25	2023/24 FEE	2024/25 Proposed FEE	Increase £	% Increase	Budget Increase (from fee proposals)
Fishing	Adult Day Ticket	£9.00	£9.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Junior Day Ticket	£7.00	£7.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Night Fishing	£22.00	£22.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	2nd or 3rd Rod - cost per additional rod	£5.00	£5.00	£0.00	0.00%	
<b>Fishing Total</b>						<b>£0</b>
<b>Planning:</b>	<b>Major development</b>					
	100+ residential units, 6000+sqm of commercial /change of use or where the site is 3ha+ PER 100 units /6000sqm/3ha or part of. <b>Bespoke hourly service for</b> 100+ residential units, 6000+sqm of commercial /change of use or where the site is 3ha+ PER 100 units /6000sqm/3ha or part of	£4,230	£4,505	£275.00	6.50%	
	25-99 residential units, 2001-5999sqm of commercial /change of use or where the site is 1ha-3ha. <b>Bespoke hourly service for</b> 25-99 residential units, 2001-5999sqm of commercial /change of use or where the site is 1ha-3ha.	£204	£218	£14.00	6.86%	
	Development requiring an EIA if not within the above categories <b>Bespoke hourly service for</b> Development requiring an EIA if not within the above categories	£4,230	£4,505	£275.00	6.50%	
		£204	£218	£14.00	6.86%	
		£4,118	£4,386	£268.00	6.51%	
		£197	£210	£13.00	6.60%	
	<b>Other Major Developments</b>					
	Provision of 10-24 dwellings or where the site is between 0.5ha and 1ha. <b>Bespoke hourly service for</b> Provision of 10-24 dwellings, 1001sqm to 2000sqm, or where the site is between 0.5ha and 1ha	£2,502	£2,665	£163.00	6.51%	
	Change of use or provision of 1001sqm - 2000sqm of commercial floor space or on a site with an area exceeding 1ha.	£120	£128	£8.00	6.67%	
		£2,502	£2,665	£163.00	6.51%	
	<b>Minor Development</b>					
	Single dwelling/replacement dwelling <b>Bespoke hourly service for</b> Single dwelling/replacement dwelling	£250	£267	£17.00	6.80%	
	2-5 dwellings <b>Bespoke hourly service for</b> 2-5 dwellings	£73	£78	£5.00	6.85%	
	6-9 dwellings <b>Bespoke hourly service for</b> 6-9 dwellings	£495	£528	£33.00	6.67%	
	Change of use of buildings/new commercial buildings with a floor space between 0-500sqm or on a site with an area up to 0.5ha. <b>Bespoke hourly service for</b> Change of use of buildings/new commercial buildings with a floor space between 0-500sqm or on a site with an area up to 0.5ha	£73	£78	£5.00	6.85%	
	Change of use of buildings/new commercial buildings with a floor space between 501sqm and 1000sqm or on a site with an area between 0.5ha and 1 ha <b>Bespoke hourly service for</b> Change of use of buildings/new commercial buildings with a floor space between 501sqm and 1000sqm or on a site with an area between 0.5ha and 1 ha	£1,278	£1,362	£84.00	6.57%	
		£73	£78	£5.00	6.85%	
		£251	£268	£17.00	6.77%	
		£73	£78	£5.00	6.85%	
		£824	£878	£54.00	6.55%	
		£73	£78	£5.00	6.85%	
	<b>Householder</b> Domestic extensions, conservatories etc. and alterations to residential properties. (WITH SITE VISITS)	£225.00	£225.00	£0.00	0.00%	

APPENDIX B FEES AND CHARGES

Service	Fees and Charges for 2024/25	2023/24 FEE	2024/25 Proposed FEE	Increase £	% Increase	Budget Increase (from fee proposals)
	Domestic extensions, conservatories etc. and alterations to residential properties. (WITHOUT SITE VISITS)	£175.00	£175.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	<b>Specialist Advice</b> Works to listed buildings Developments affecting a conservation area	£173	£185	£12.00	6.94%	
	<b>Advertisements</b> Per Site	£200	£213	£13.00	6.50%	
	<b>Assistant Director</b> Costs per hour for the Assistant Director to attend meetings.	£288	£307	£19.00	6.60%	
	<b>New Planning Fees from 2023/24</b>					
	Direct Application Fee	£48	£48.00	£0.00	0.00%	
	Enquiry Fee	£10	£11.00	£1.00	10.00%	
	Deed Novation/Variation	£2,000	£2,000.00	£0.00	0.00%	
<b>Planning Total</b>						<b>£3,140</b>
Hackney Carriages:		various		£0.00	0.00%	
Env Health & Licensing:	<b>Housing Act 2004</b>					
	Licence for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)	£830	£870	£40.00	4.82%	£950
	Service of Housing Act Notices	£430	£452	£22.00	5.12%	
Env Health & Licensing:	<b>Food Premises</b>					£850
	Destruction Certificate	£150	£158	£8.00	5.33%	
	Health Certificate	£120	£130	£10.00	8.33%	
Env Health & Licensing:	Licensing including: Acupuncture, street trading etc.					£4,455
Local Land Charges	Residential Property (Con 29)	£80.60	£92.70	£12.10	15.01%	
VAT Is PAYABLE on these fees (fees shown is GROSS of VAT) Integra Code = RC110	Residential Property (LLC1) NO VAT	£19.65	£19.65	£0.00	0.00%	
	Commercial Property and Areas of Land (Con 29)	£102.80	£118.20	£15.40	14.98%	
	Commercial Property and Areas of Land (LLC1) NO VAT	£25.55	£25.55	£0.00	0.00%	
	Con29O Enquiry Q4 and additional parcels of land	£13.50	£15.50	£2.00	14.81%	
	Con29O Enquiry Q5-21 (each)	£6.75	£7.75	£1.00	14.81%	
	Con29O Enquiry Q22	£31.70	£36.45	£4.75	14.98%	
	Additional Enquiry	£14.65	£16.85	£2.20	15.02%	£7,784
Housing General Fund:	Careline Alarm- private (Shortfall funded from General Fund)					

**Total £396,588**

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**Meeting** Executive  
**Portfolio Area** Regeneration  
**Date** 12 October 2023



## TOWNS FUND – PROGRAMME DELIVERY UPDATE

### NON KEY DECISION

**LEAD OFFICER: DAVE WELLS AUTHOR: LUCY KING**

## 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report aims to provide an update on to the projects within the Government’s Towns Fund programme being delivered by Stevenage Borough Council and Stevenage Development Board partners. The Council, acting as the Accountable Body for the delivery of Towns Fund, is required to provide formal updates to the Executive under DLUHC guidelines.

## 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

That Executive notes the endorsement from the Stevenage Development Board on the following recommendations, and:

- 2.1 Notes the progress of the ‘Transforming the Town Centre’ regeneration programme, specifically the DLUHC grant funded Towns Fund projects.
- 2.2 Notes the progress made and early-stage consultation with regarding the New Towns Heritage Centre and Museum.
- 2.3 Authorises delegated authority to the Strategic Director (TP) to procurement of design services via procurement framework for the Station Gateway and

Central Core West Major Opportunities Areas (MOA), noting the work undertaken thus far.

- 2.4** Notes the amends to the 2023/24 spend profile, in line with official DLUHC guidelines (3.30-4.3).

### **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1** The Future Town Future Council (FTFC) Programme identifies the regeneration of the Town Centre as the top priority for Stevenage Borough Council. This will have long lasting benefits for residents, businesses, and visitors.

- 3.2** To support this priority, the Stevenage Town Investment Plan was developed following invitation from the Government in 2019, and Stevenage was successfully awarded £37.5 million of funding through the Department of Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Towns Fund programme. Each of the 9 projects included in this programme required Green Book Business Cases to be developed which were successfully approved by the Executive, following endorsement from the Stevenage Development Board, in 2021/22. This report seeks to provide an update on the delivery of Towns Fund and subsequently highlight some of the successes which have dovetailed from this investment.

#### **Skills, Enterprise & Life Sciences**

- 3.3** Stevenage is situated centrally within the UK Innovation Corridor (UKIC), part of a dynamic cluster connecting London to Cambridge which supports an economy worth £189 billion, 2.8 million jobs, out-performs the Oxford to Cambridge Arc and is now Britain's Fastest Growing Region. Stevenage is already home to a world-leading life science cluster, including more than 40 life science companies and the Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult. Following the recent move of Autolus into the Marshgate Biotech project, support by the Towns Fund programme, other major bioscience companies have come forward with requirements for space in locations within Stevenage town centre.
- 3.4** In response, two private sector led schemes have come forward to create a significant supply of life sciences laboratory space in the town centre and on an adjacent fringe location, where over half a million square feet of laboratory space is now to be developed. One is The Forum, a significant mixed-use development on the Forum buildings and car park which will deliver over 400,000 sqft of laboratory and research office facilities, over 60,000 sqft of retail space. Planning permission was issued in June 2023.
- 3.5** In addition, UBS Asset Management and Reef have announced development of a major new campus for life science firms in Stevenage and provide up to 1.4 million square feet of lab and office facilities, space for up to 5,000 new jobs, alongside GSK's existing Global R&D centre and the Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst, the leading location for advanced therapeutics in the UK.
- 3.6** The level of investment that is being seen in Stevenage continues to highlight the need to provide opportunities for our residents to upskill and be a part of

the significant Life Science investment the town is experiencing. Skills, STEM and enterprise remain a key theme of the Towns Fund programme, with two projects directly supporting these aspirations. One project being the Stevenage Innovation and Technology Centre (SITEC), which saw Phase 1 delivered in partnership with North Herts College and Hertfordshire LEP. SITEC aims to provide a space for local people to the skills and knowledge needed for success in the many STEM businesses in the area. Phase 1 of SITEC repurposed space at NHC including refurbished laboratory space and state of the art industry equipment.

- 3.7** Building upon these aspirations, Mission 44 approach the Council last year to discuss their interest in funding a project to support Stevenage's young people (heard at Executive February 2023). The establishment of a partnership consisting of the Council, Mission 44, NHC, UoH and Hertfordshire LEP developed the Pioneering Young STEM Futures programme which launched in September 2023. The vision to create the right environment so that Stevenage's disadvantaged Young People have equal access as their peers to Stevenage's STEM careers.
- 3.8** These partnerships and ambitions for growing and nurturing the STEM and Life Science sector in Stevenage is demonstrated through the progress above.

#### **Other Project Progress 2022-23**

- 3.9** 2022-23 has been full of achievements for Stevenage, building upon the work set out in the Town Investment Plan. Under the Diversification of Retail project, Event Island Stevenage began construction on the old bus station site, opening to the public in October 2022, utilising a mix of Towns Fund allocation and support from UKSPF. Event Island Stevenage is a new green space that offers a multi-purpose and informal play area with a variety of activities. The ambition to deliver a temporary space to generate activity for local communities to use and enjoy, a place to dwell and contribute positively to urban life. The impact of the space has been greatly received, growing the Town Centre event schedule through joined up planning across a number of council departments.
- 3.10** In May 2022, work began on the new Railway North Multi-Storey Car Park (MSCP), opening to the public in May 2023. The project doubled the available car parking provision with 622 spaces, with spaces for electric vehicle charging and blue badge spaces split across all levels plus secure cycling parking for 80 bikes. External metal facades incorporate images highlighting the achievements of Stevenage in the fields of science and technology and celebrating that the heart of a town lies in its people.
- 3.11** A full wrap up of project delivery from Towns Fund and beyond can be found in Appendix A.

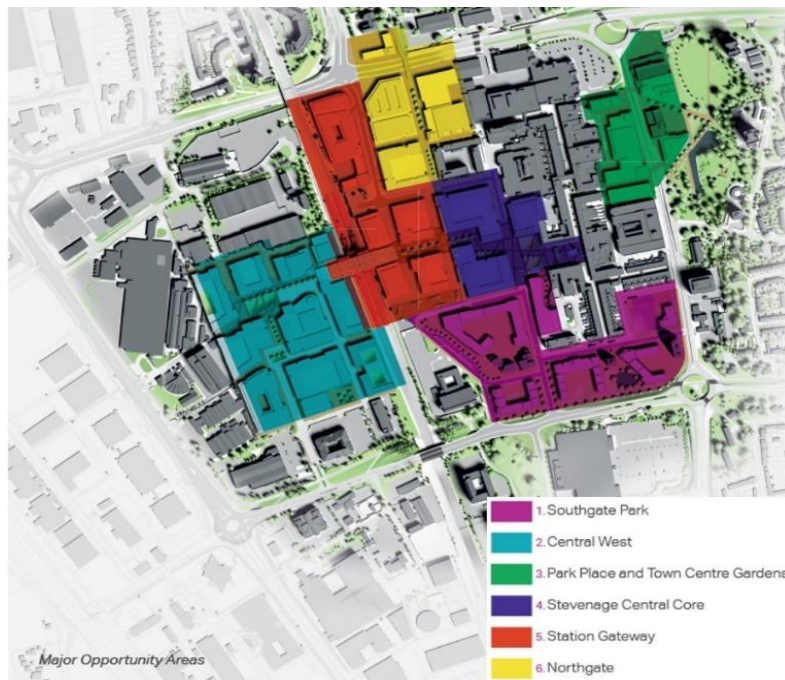
#### **Station Gateway**

- 3.12** Under the Station Gateway project within Towns Fund, significant progress has been made with the completion of the new MSCP in May 2023, as noted above. The new MSCP begins releasing surface level car parking which begins to unlock the wider Station Gateway and Central West Major

Opportunity Areas (MOA), as noted in Stevenage Central Framework (SCF) (2015):

*“Station Gateway MOA is the key to stimulating the demand for office space in Stevenage Central. Lytton Way is proposed to be reconfigured and the land released used to provide development sites close to Stevenage Station. It is essential to create development sites alongside the potential to construct a new station building in response to growing demand as the station develops its role as a key hub Station on the East Coast Mainline. Available development sites and a modern rail gateway into Stevenage Central are essential pre-requisites to create a market for commercial development.”*

**3.13** Stevenage Central – Major Opportunity Areas graphic



**3.14** From the SCF (2015), each MOA highlights proposed uses and development capacity. The Station Gateway MOA highlights opportunities for a new rail station, new bus station and MSCP (already delivered), high-quality and mixed-use blocks to include retail, residential and office space, and hotel provision. A total site of 6.6ha.

**3.15** There is funding available from Towns Fund (£500k) to continue the master-planning and enabling work, in which this report seeks approval from the Executive to continue. The Council’s Planning Policy team has been developing an Area Action Plan for the Station Gateway Area over the past two years, and the funding for master planning will support the next phase of work to plan how the area can develop over the next decade. There has been positive engagement with a landowners and government agencies over recent months to support this moving forward. It is a prime time to continue master-planning this next phase of regeneration as the Sports & Leisure Hub project progresses, including future options for an eventual use of the Arts & Leisure Centre site, and building the case to government for an improved rail station. It is important to note Officers will continue to look at opportunities to work with partners to progress, but this is a long term ambition with no

assumptions being made at this stage in connection to the Station and Lytton Way as these early stage discussions progress.

- 3.16** Officers propose use of an approved procurement framework, subject to procurement, legal and commercial review, to procure design services and engage with relevant local partners through the design process.

### **New Towns Heritage Centre & Stevenage Museum**

- 3.17** The New Towns Heritage Centre & Museum project within the programme, includes the provision of a new museum and cultural facility that celebrates the New Towns movement and the important history of the people of Stevenage. This will include modern exhibits that utilise technology, enriches people's understanding of the New Towns movement nationally, and creates an accessible and diverse facility that enriches cultural experiences for as many residents as possible. The facility will be delivered as part of the Public Sector Hub in the town centre, creating a real cultural and community hub with integration with a food and beverage offer, the library, and pop-up spaces and events.
- 3.18** Through the development of this business case, the new facility benefitted from a significant body of work carried out by the Council's Community Select Committee in 2021 including site visits and both informal and formal meetings. The aim was to give cross-party representation of Members the opportunity to help shape the early thinking around the project. The work resulted in five main recommendations, these and a full summary can be found in Appendix C.
- 3.19** In addition to Member engagement, a series of engagement focus groups were carried out with a wide range of stakeholders including regular visitors and volunteers of the current Museum, public sector and community partners, business owners and other leading organisations. They discussed:
- Current and future audiences.
  - Barriers to engagement.
  - The current museum – what works and what does not.
  - The new facility.
  - Potential ways of working together.
  - Physical infrastructure.
  - The most important elements to take forward.
- 3.20** The full findings of these meetings can be viewed in Appendix B, however the essence of the finds is that the new facility should be:

*“A community asset based on the ground floor of the new building, with additional staff and resources to tell the story of Stevenage contextualised by the story New Towns. The community stakeholders want the spaces to be interactive, co-created, developed and delivery in collaboration with the local community and embodying the pioneering spirit of Stevenage.”*

- 3.21** 'The heart of a town lies in its people' is the motto on Stevenage's coat of arms; a phrase that was recounted a number of times in the consultation as the guiding principle for how Stevenage Museum is currently delivered and how it should be delivered in its new home in the centre of its town.
- 3.22** Building upon the work mentioned above, throughout June and into early July 2023, an early-stage consultation survey was carried out to understand what residents and visitors expect from their new Museum. Key messaging included:
- The Stevenage Museum is a key feature of Stevenage town centre. Showcasing the history of the town, along with a programme of events for all the family, the Museum is a much-loved community space that celebrates the arts, culture, and history of the UK's first New Town. It needs to be given a 'centrepiece' setting, celebrated, and expanded for the future so that we can continue to tell our story.
  - Under current plans, the Museum will be relocated to the Hub, a one-stop location for public services overlooking a new garden square. As early works on the design of this Hub begin, this is an ideal opportunity to recognise how The Museum should be integrated, and what our local residents and businesses expect from a relocated Museum.
  - This is the start of an extensive consultation period for people to have their say on how they would like to see the Museum positioned.
  - We want this new space to be an even better focal point to celebrate the arts and culture of our town, allowing us to better celebrate our heritage. We are the UK's first new town and throughout our regeneration we have sought to embed our heritage, arts, and culture into the wider programme. The Museum project sits at the epicentre of this.
- 3.23** 293 responses were received from the survey (available on both paper and online) which hosted both qualitative and quantitative questions, a summary of the key responses are below. A full report has been provided to the architects currently working on The Hub to ensure the early feedback can be incorporated to design.
- What would encourage you to visit? A more central locations, more exhibition and activity/event space, different opening hours.
  - Top 3 facilities? Café, toilets, and rentable space for the community.
  - Top 3 activities & events? Family friendly, educational, and interactive experiences.



**3.24** As noted in 4.2, the new facility is to be included as part of the Public Sector Hub, being delivered at part of SG1 with developers Mace. The Hub is currently in early design stages, in which a team of architects have been appointed by Mace. They are working closely with all stakeholders including the Council, community and voluntary services, Hertfordshire County Council, and a multitude of health services. It is envisioned the Executive will receive a full update at the next project gateway decision, following the conclusion of RIBA stages 1 and 2.

**3.25** Alongside the practical design and stakeholder management, the Council are actively exploring business case funding options to support the delivery of the project.

**Towns Fund Delivery – Next Steps**

**3.26** The Towns Fund programme has a spend deadline of March 2026. Great progress has been made on delivery in the last two years, and with 2 and a half financial years remaining officers are actively progressing the remaining projects to achieve this target-date.

**3.27** With £9m allocated to skills and enterprise, the next 6 months will see further development of project outline cases to enable confident delivery of spend. Officers continue to engage with Stevenage Development Board to incorporate their ideas to this workstream.

**3.28** To support Council’s in delivery, DLUHC has recently introduced a delegated Project Adjustment Request (PAR) process for some of its Levelling Up programmes. Following this announcement, they have updated the Towns Fund PAR guidance and republished some general principles and criteria for places making changes to their projects.

**3.29** This guidance includes:

- What constitutes a Project Adjustment Request (PAR)?
- What is out of scope for a PAR?
- What criteria PARs need to meet?
- How are PARs assessed?
- How to Submit PARs

**3.30** DLUHC have given Accountable Body’s the power to solely move project funding across years with no change to planned outputs and outcomes and

removed this out of the scope for a PAR. However, should there be any changes required in the future surrounding project outputs, officer's would come back to the Executive for their approval prior to submitting a PAR.

**3.31** The full guidance document can be found in Appendix D.

#### **4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS**

**4.1** The Council are looking to utilise the power to move project funding across years for the 2023/24 profile (below, 4.2). The proposal is to shift the funding for both Stevenage Enterprise Centre and SITEC to be achieved in 2024/25. The reason being these projects are officers are continuing to define the delivery mechanisms with partners for the projects in question and having the funds available next financial will place the Council in the best position possible to be delivered.

**4.2** The table below summarises the existing funding profile approved by government and the Stevenage Development Board

<b>2023/24 Funding Profile</b>	<b>Total £10,650,000</b>
Stevenage Enterprise Centre	£4,000,000
Gunnels Wood Road Infrastructure	£1,000,000
Station Gateway	£0 (£500k 24/25)
Marshgate	£0
SITEC	£2,000,000
New Towns Heritage Centre & Museum	£500,000
Stevenage Sports & Leisure Hub	£2,100,000
Cycling & Pedestrian Connectivity	£1,000,000
Diversification of Retail	£50,000

**4.3** There is no longer the requirement to take this decision through a PAR process, however for transparency, the Stevenage Development Board have fully endorsed the decision (September 2023 Board Meeting) and are asking the Executive to note the change as the accountable body.

**4.4** The Towns Fund programme leads have presented these recommendations and the findings to the Development Board and the Chair. The Development



Board have noted the substantial progress of the Towns Fund programme in 2022/3 and endorsed the continuing of the projects.

- 4.5** Stevenage Borough Council are the Accountable Body for the Towns Fund allocation. Therefore, the Executive is asked to consider the recommendations as noted in section 2 to continue the progress of the programme and utilise the Accountable Body powers to reprofile the funding and reflect this within SBC own capital reporting.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **5 Financial Implications**

- 5.1.1** There are no financial implications in relation to the moving of funds between financial years. However, it is important to note the delivery of the Towns Fund projects are not solely covered by this funding stream and requires match funding from other third-party avenues and/or the Council. A capital funding strategy is required to further explore all capital pressures Council-wide and further exploration as to the priority of delivery.
- 5.1.2** Members should note that the current Towns Fund conditions require the grant to be fully spent by 31 March 2026.

### **5.2 Legal Implications**

- 5.2.1** The approval process previously set out at Executive and Council (“Transforming our Town Centre progress update and Towns Fund decision making”) has been followed for all Towns Fund business cases. There will be further decision-making gateways required as projects continue to mobilise. There are some projects in which our partners will be directly delivering and the Council solely acting as the accountable body. In preparation for this, Accountable Body Agreements have been drafted and following Legal Services review they will be issued ahead of any funds being transferred.

### **5.3 Risk Implications**

- 5.3.1** Full details of risks relating to each of the Towns Fund projects can be found in their individual business cases. As projects mobilise and enter into delivery, full risk registers are updated.
- 5.3.2** Further work is required on the capital funding strategy for all of the Council’s ambitions and noted above.
- 5.3.3** There is a risk that if schemes are part-funded by Towns Fund, but not delivered in the required timescales (spend by March 2026), unspent funding will have to be returned to government.

## **APPENDICES**

- A Towns Fund Delivery Highlights 2022/23
- B Museum Community Stakeholder Report November 2021
- C Community Select Committee 2021 – New Towns Heritage Centre Recommendations
- D Towns Fund PAR Guidance July 2023

# Stevenage Even Better

presents the highlights  
from 2022-23



2022-23 has been full of achievements for Stevenage. The Stevenage Bus Interchange became operational, and construction began at Event Island Stevenage, opening to the public in October. In May 2022, work began on the new multi-storey car park which opened to the public in May 2023.

Elsewhere, we saw our partners continue to work on sites across the town, including on the new HQ for Autolus, and The Guinness Partnership kicking off works with a ground-breaking ceremony where we will see 143 affordable homes delivered in the first phase.

The first phase of SITEC officially opened at North Herts College and construction sites continue to support young people looking to enter the field of construction.

Here we take a look at everything that has been achieved in 2022 - 23. 2023 - 24 promises to be an equally exciting year for the town, as we continue to expand our life sciences sector and watch developments take shape within the town centre.

**Adrian Hawkins OBE, Chair of the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and the Stevenage Development Board:**

“Stevenage was the UK’s first New Town and the past year has shown that we really are on track to deliver the 20-year, £1bn regeneration programme - it truly will bring to life the benefits of living and working in the town.

“The regeneration project has already gone a long way to restoring Stevenage to its former glory and it’s clear we are creating a new and vibrant place where people can live, work and play.

“One of the key initial projects is SITEC, the Stevenage Innovation and Technology Centre. This will be an important piece for driving the aspiration of people in the town and helping to bring some of the real earning opportunities to the people that live here because there are great jobs out there.

“It has also been thrilling to see Stevenage Railway Station multi-storey car park open. This almost doubles the number of parking spaces of the former surface level car park and is just one of a number of the projects to have benefited from the Stevenage Town Investment Plan, set out by the Stevenage Development Board. This is clearly already benefiting both residents and businesses and is a real step-change for the town”.



**Our regeneration programme is built around a number of key aspirations for Stevenage, growing our reputation for life sciences, transforming the town and introducing new uses including town centre living, leisure and experience whilst incorporating arts, culture and Stevenage’s unique heritage.**



*The interior of the SITEC building*

**Skills, Enterprise & Life Sciences**

We are driving private sector investment and ensuring that our town has the space to support small business development, skills, and jobs, including the opportunity for our residents to gain experience and expand into the construction industry.

Stevenage is well recognised on the international stage for life sciences, and we are continuing to grow the third largest cell and gene therapy cluster globally alongside our partners.

**Stevenage Innovation & Technology Centre (SITEC)**

SITEC is a new venture created in partnership with the College, Stevenage Borough Council, and Hertfordshire LEP. It aims to make the most of Stevenage’s position in the Golden Triangle of Research and Development between Oxford, Cambridge, and London, providing a space for local people to the skills and knowledge needed for success in the many STEM businesses in the area. NHC have been busy this year preparing and launching phase one of SITEC utilising space available on their Stevenage campus. The repurposed space includes rebranding, refurbished laboratory, state of the art industry equipment and upgrades to lighting for sustainability improvements.





*Works ongoing at the Autolus site.  
Credit: Sean Lee*

### **Autolus (Reef Group and funding partner UBS)**

After securing planning permission in 2021 the ground-breaking ceremony marked the start of works on the old surface level car park and Autolus' £65 million investment into the new European HQ developed at rapid speed. The building is now operational with some public realm works ongoing.

### **The Forum (Reef Group)**

The development in the town centre is a significant mixed-use development on the Forum buildings and car park. The scheme includes new buildings which will deliver over 400,000 sqft of laboratory and research office facilities, over 60,000 sqft of retail space and the creation of a new multi-storey car park with 326 spaces. In addition, new high quality public realm and important cycling and pedestrian connections will be implemented, most notably a Toucan (at grade) crossing across St. George's way and a new cycle path connecting to existing connections. Planning permission was issued in June.



*An artist's impression of The Forum development.  
Credit: Reef Group*

## **Regeneration & Land Use**

Delivering a self-sustaining town centre for the future that uses a new residential community, local employment, evening economy and a diverse range of facilities and amenities to maximise activity and provide the strongest local offer possible will ensure that the town is a thriving place for people and businesses.



*A night time image of the new car park*

### **Station Gateway**

Construction started in May 2022 on the new multi-storey car park adjacent to Stevenage Railway Station, which opened in May 2023. The car park has spaces for electric vehicle charging, secure cycle parking for 80 bikes and blue badge spaces split across different levels. External metal facades incorporate images highlighting the achievements of Stevenage in the fields of science and technology and celebrating that the heart of a town lies in its people.



**Councillor Richard Henry,  
Leader of Stevenage Borough Council**

“Our town centre is changing, like many across the country. Well before the pandemic, we recognised the need for its shift in purpose. This is now more important than ever given the changing landscape of the retail industry with online shopping continuing to be prominent amongst many consumers. Working with our private sector partners, we are embracing this new world. Our vision is for a 21st Century New Town with improved transport facilities, leisure, culture, retail spaces, town centre living and a variety of job opportunities. We are part way through this ambitious £1bn transformation, delivering for the communities and businesses of today and tomorrow.”



**Culture & Heritage**

We are enhancing the vitality of the town through the introduction of new quality cultural and leisure assets, widening the cultural offer and celebrating the towns heritage to drive local growth through a thriving destination & evening economy.



An aerial image showing Event Island Stevenage and the Town Square. Credit: Sean Lee

**Diversification of Retail,  
Event Island Stevenage**

On the site of the old bus station, Event Island Stevenage is a new green space that offers a multi-purpose and informal play area with a variety of activities for informal play, featuring 11 news trees and planting. The ambition was to deliver a temporary space to generate activity for local communities to use and enjoy, a place to dwell and contribute positively to urban life. It was designed to play a key role in activating the vacant station site and adjacent retail frontages, enhancing the pedestrian movements across the space, attracting footfall and encouraging spend to support local businesses.

**Pedestrian & Cycling Connectivity  
(incl. Arts & Heritage Trail)**

This year saw the installation of three plaques in the Town Square celebrating the heritage of key pieces of artwork including the Peter Lyon Sculpture, C.W.S. Mural & the Joy Ride. The plaque design will be continued across the arts & heritage trail as it is developed this year. Secure cycle storage has been implemented as part of the new MSCP. This project is one that will be accelerating this coming year, watch this space!





## Connectivity

Enhancing linkages within Stevenage and beyond by improving connectivity between jobs and services and between businesses and their markets, enhanced connectivity throughout the town will help to unlock new employment and apprenticeships/skills opportunities.

### Bus Interchange

Opened in June 2022, this new facility improves the town's travel links with the expanded railway station and offers modern heated, covered waiting facilities with a café and toilets for users. The Interchange utilises sustainable drainage which funnels rainwater into the ground allowing bus users to enjoy new green landscaped areas with planted trees and wildflower meadow areas to increase local biodiversity.



## Coming up this year

The next year promises to be full of excitement within the town, with projects moving to their delivery phases. There will be an increasing amount of community engagement, on specific schemes and the wider programme.

### Guinness Partnership

The Guinness Partnership held an event to celebrate breaking ground on the first phase of their development at the former Matalan site. Lovell Partnerships, the appointed contractors will be starting construction at the prominent town centre site which was granted planning permission in 2021. The overall plans involve the construction of 526 one and two-bedroomed apartments along with 779 sq. m of flexible commercial space located at street level which aims to create active street frontages. The delivery of the new development will take place in phases, the first of which being two blocks located on the eastern part of the site facing Danestrete and the top end of Danesgate. Phase 1 will provide 143 one and two-bedroomed apartments and all new homes will be offered as affordable tenures, providing a new and very valuable source of low cost homes located in the heart of Stevenage. It will also include one of the internal landscaped gardens serving the development. The expected construction programme for the first phase is completion by the end of 2024/early 2025. Future phases are expected to follow from 2025 onwards.



### Sport & Leisure Hub

Morgan Sindall Construction's Northern Home Counties business has been appointed by Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) to help deliver a multi-million-pound Sports and Leisure Hub, as part of the town's wider regeneration plans. Set to be situated adjacent to the main Town Centre Gardens on St George's Way, it will consolidate Stevenage's health and wellbeing offering, which is currently positioned across three different sites. Stevenage Sports and Leisure Hub will be a flexible state-of-the-art facility with swimming, studios, gym space and flexible sports facilities. Not only will the Stevenage Sports and Leisure Hub deliver significantly improved sports facilities that will promote healthy living for Stevenage residents, but it will also provide improved links between The Forum, Town Centre Gardens, Stevenage Old Town, King George V Playing Fields, and residential areas beyond. Throughout construction, local swimming provision will remain in operation.

## Facts



**260**

entries were received from school children as part of a competition to name the vacant bus station - now known as Event Island Stevenage.

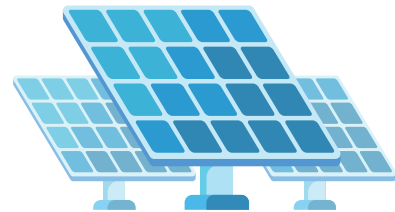
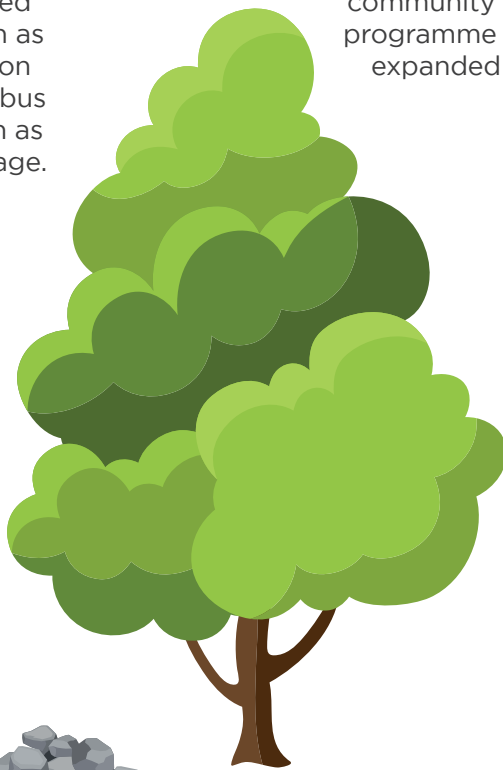


**11**

community centres have been visited as part of a programme of community outreach, which will be expanded on over the course of the next year

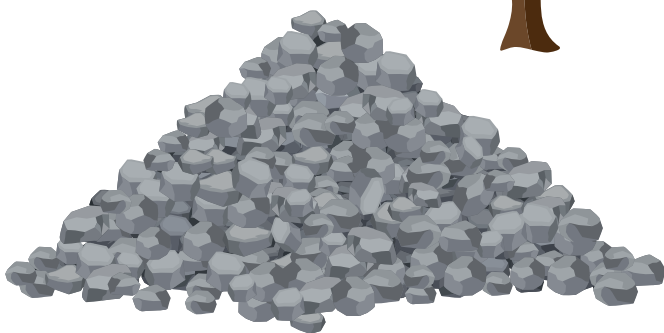
**11**

new trees have been planted - and all the original trees retained - at Event Island Stevenage



**76**

solar panels have been installed as part of the new multi-storey car park and secure cycle storage



**263m<sup>3</sup>**

Recycling materials across construction sites forms an important part of our sustainability approach. 263m<sup>3</sup> of crush from the site of the former Swingate House was used to help construct Event Island.



**1,800**

Greening our town centre is important to encourage people to visit. At Event Island Stevenage, 1800 new plants and flowers have been planted to support this initiative.



## Raising the profile of Stevenage

People are talking about Stevenage. There has been tangible delivery on the ground and the change that is taking place has been recognised.

Throughout the industry, Stevenage is well-known and is increasing in prominence as a town undergoing successful transformation. We continue to attract interest and investment.

Partnership working and the dedicated support of a wide number of individuals, including the members of the Stevenage Development Board, is helping an ambition to be realised that offers opportunities to our communities, residents and businesses.

Over the course of the year, we have welcomed a number of industry stakeholders to the town to see the work underway. Prominent visits include:

### ● Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

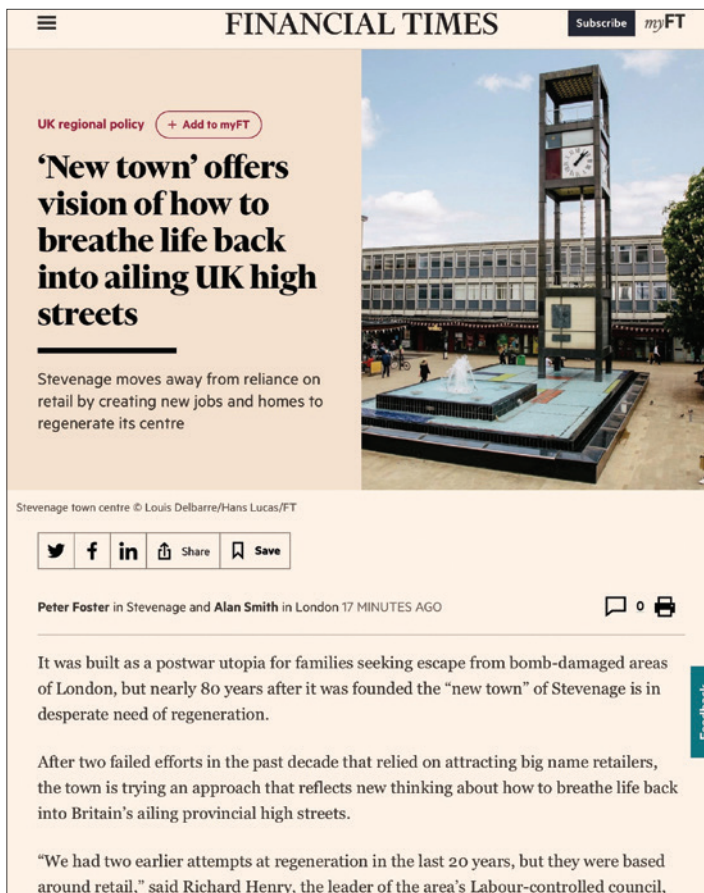
Visit from DLUHC regional team to SBC and HCC to see services from community safety and house building and a tour of the town centre.

### ● David Locke Associates

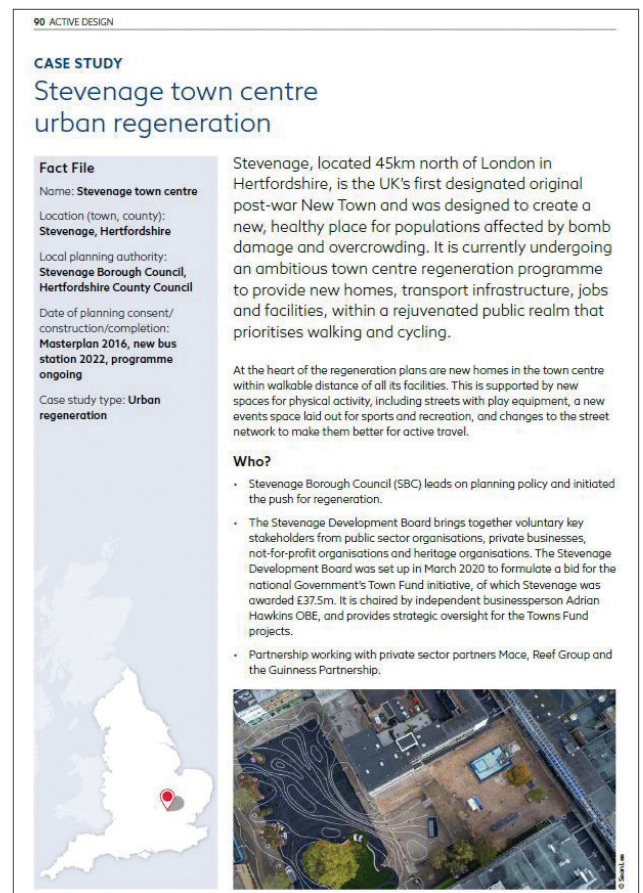
Joint visit from David Locke Associates and Sports England, who are using Stevenage as a case study for updated national Active Design guidance.

### ● High Streets Task Force – Unlocking Your Place Potential

Funded place-expert to learn what is happening in the town, challenges to transformation and provide diagnostic report on future recommendations



An article in the Financial Times on Saturday 20 May



Stevenage as a case study in Sport England's Active Design Guidance (2023)

## Industry Events

The team and partners attended UKREiiF in May 2023, taking a stand alongside two other Hertfordshire authorities to further share the story of Stevenage. Highlights included an event on the stand, opened by Adrian Hawkins OBE, and a panel discussion on Using Science and Innovation for Good Growth, with panellists including Cllr Richard Henry and Kasia Averall from The Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult.



Adrian Hawkins OBE speaking at the stand event, UKREiiF (2023)



Council Leader Cllr Richard Henry and Kasia Averall from The Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult speak on a panel at UKREiiF (2023)

## Awards

We are entering a number of projects for awards, demonstrating the progress achieved and how Stevenage is a town that is delivering.

To date, awards entered include:

- **Visa's Let's Celebrate Towns initiative.** Stevenage was shortlisted as a Champion Town.
- **The Pineapple Awards.** Event Island Stevenage was entered for these awards, celebrating placemaking and the contribution that the new space is making.
- **Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire Constructing Excellence Awards.** Co-Space and The North Block won the 'Excellence in Innovation' award. The award recognises projects that have developed innovative approaches to overcome challenges.

## Engaging with the Community

Part of our work this year has been expanding our community outreach programme, visiting a number of community centres across the borough to explain the story of regeneration and seek feedback.

This programme will continue throughout the year, alongside some more targeted programmes of engagement.

# STEVENAGE BETTER

a place for everyone

[www.Stevenage-Even-Better.com](http://www.Stevenage-Even-Better.com)  
[regeneration@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:regeneration@stevenage.gov.uk)



@StevenageBetter



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2021

# Community Stakeholder consultation report for Stevenage Museum



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## Contents

Contents.....	1
1. Executive Summary.....	2
2. Consultation findings.....	3
2.1. Introduction.....	3
2.2. Findings.....	3
2.2.1. Current audiences.....	3
2.2.2. Future audiences.....	5
2.2.3. Barriers to engagement.....	5
2.2.4. The current museum.....	6
2.2.5. What does not work well for the current museum.....	6
2.2.6. The new museum.....	7
2.2.7. Potential ways of working together.....	13
2.2.8. Physical infrastructure.....	15
2.2.9. The most important elements to take forward.....	15
3. Implications.....	17
3.1 Building.....	17
3.2 Museum content.....	17
3.3 Programming.....	18
3.4 Staff, volunteering and resources.....	18
3.5 Promotion and publicity.....	19
4. Next steps.....	19
3. Appendix A: Attendees.....	20

## 1. Executive Summary

### *‘The heart of a town lies in its people’*

Stevenage Museum is a hidden gem just outside the town centre; hidden beneath a church and beyond a dual carriageway. But it is a place where people gather to tell their stories, learn about their town and their neighbours’ histories, to share life experiences, to learn, grow and have fun. Stevenage has received funding to move the museum to the town centre, to a new building that it can share with community partners which will bring it to life, update the displays and share stories and experiences with the wider community.

To support the museum’s move this consultation was commissioned to understand what community stakeholders with a vested interest in Stevenage Museum, value about the current museum and the guiding principles that should be taken forward for the new museum. Therefore, thirty three community stakeholders attended one of three focus groups in November 2021.

The findings of these meetings are outlined in detail below but the essence of the findings are that the new Stevenage Museum should be a community asset based on the ground floor of the new building, with additional staff and resources, to tell the story of Stevenage contextualised by the story of New Towns. The community stakeholders want the museum to be interactive, co-created, developed and delivered in collaboration with the local community and embodying the ‘pioneering’ spirit of Stevenage.

*‘The heart of a town lies in its people’* is the motto on Stevenage’s coat of arms; a phrase that was recounted a number of times in the consultation as the guiding principle for how Stevenage Museum is currently delivered and how it should be delivered in its new home in the centre of its town.

## 2. Consultation findings

### 2.1. Introduction

In November 2021 thirty three community stakeholders attended one of three focus groups to understand what they value about the current Stevenage Museum and what they would like from the new Stevenage Museum. A full list of attendees can be found in Appendix A, but they covered a cross section of the local community stakeholders, including museum and council staff, volunteers, councillors, artists, university lecturers, teachers, community leaders and business owners. The one thing they had in common was that they all had a deeply held commitment to and love of the museum.

The sessions were held on a weekday afternoon, a weekday evening and a Saturday morning to ensure that as many people as possible could attend.



3

### 2.2. Findings

Below are the combined findings of the three focus groups. It must be noted that all the attendees were current stakeholders, their commitment to the museum and the impact it can have is reflected in their comments, and this is echoed in the very similar responses to the questions by each of the focus groups.

#### 2.2.1. Current audiences

To facilitate the groups to think about what the museum currently offers, a list of the existing audiences was developed. These lists have been amalgamated below:

Formal education:

- Mostly primary schools
- Limited secondary schools
- Outreach, including loans boxes
- Arts Award
- 6th Form
- University Students

Claire Adler

Heritage Consultant: Learning, Community, Development



#### Families:

- Under 5s
- Under 8s – it was noted that there had been a decrease in age for family workshops since the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemic
- Birthday parties

#### Volunteers:

- Adults
- People with additional needs
- 6<sup>th</sup> Form and University students
- Teenagers

#### Community groups

- Drop in visits
- Workshops
- Projects
- Meetings
- Outreach, including loans boxes

#### Elders

- Volunteers
- Events
- Community groups – dementia groups, Age Concern etc

4

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#### Specialist interest groups and researchers particularly of

- New Towns
- Family heritage
- Social history
- The Vincent motor bike

#### Tourists

- Overseas visitors from the nearby Hotel
- Day trippers, particularly during the Covid 19 pandemic

#### General visitors

- New residents to Stevenage, to understand the context of the town.

Social media and the website were felt to target across all of these audiences.

The audiences that were felt to cut across these core audiences were people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and also people of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic heritage.

*'It is amazing the diversity of the audience that is coming through the doors here, given the current location... it is important to recognise what a huge shift translating this place, with its ethos, collections and staff will be for the new museum.'*

### 2.2.2. Future audiences

Having ascertained the current audiences for Stevenage Museum, the participants were shown the following breakdown of the demographic of Stevenage residents, based on the 2011 census.

- Dominant adult age group is 34 – 49 years old
- Dominant child age group is 0-4 year olds
- 53% have no dependent children in their family; 47% do
- 12% of people living in Stevenage are from a Black, Asian or mixed ethnic group
- 7% are limited a lot and 9% are limited a little in their day-to-day activities by ill health or disability
- C2/D/E households make up 48% of households in the target area, compared with 40% of households in the base area
- 22% have achieved Level 4 qualifications and above (e.g. Higher Education/Higher diploma) and 22% have achieved no qualifications
- 45% economically inactive people in Stevenage are retired, 19% looking after home or family and 13% are long-term sick or disabled.

As a result, the participants were asked to identify who the new museum should target in addition to the core audiences outlined above. These lists have been amalgamated below:

- Passers-by – these are very limited with the current location
- People of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic heritage through community groups and as individuals
- Possibly 12 to 18 year olds through volunteering programmes such as Duke of Edinburgh
- 19 to 24 year olds through volunteering programmes
- More young professionals, or working 30 to 49 year olds, who do not have children
- Pub goers – people who do not see museums as relevant to their lives but are interested in local history
- People with mental and physical ill health
- People without qualifications
- People within a one hour travel time of Stevenage, this will include Hertfordshire, north London and into Cambridgeshire.
- Coach tours
- Retired adults
- Transport enthusiasts

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5

These audiences were used to frame the thinking of the purpose of the new Stevenage Museum.

However further work is needed with the museum staff to work out which of these audiences need to be the target audiences for the new museum, and what the space, programming and storytelling implications will be for the museum.

### 2.2.3. Barriers to engagement

Some of the barriers to engage with the museum that were discussed included:

- the dual carriageway;
- being within a church;
- perceptions of museums 'being for posh people' – although it was noted that 63% of families participating in an event at the museum said that they hadn't visited a museum before;

- perceptions that potential visitors will not see representations of themselves, or people who look like them in the museum.

#### 2.2.4. The current museum

The focus groups were asked what they valued most about the current museum, that should be carried into the new museum. Their responses can be summarised as: the staff and their methodology of being community focused and responsive to their communities needs.

However, the following elements were discussed:

- The staff and volunteers are viewed as a significant asset to the museum.
- The museum is seen as warm and friendly:

*'It is free, it is warm and people can get a drink. That is a really important thing for the town as there are so few places you can go now that you can sit if you need somewhere to sit and not have to spend money.'*

*'I think it has an alternative appeal, a bit fringy, alternative, not clinical, approachable and not like the rest of the town and that would be nice if it was kept in the new museum.'*

- The formal and informal education programmes for families and schools that are developed and delivered to meet the needs of the audiences.
- The temporary exhibition programme developed in collaboration with the local community.
- The willingness of staff to collaborate and to be responsive to the needs of the audiences.
- The collaboration with local artists and art organisations *'...is outstanding'*.
- The use of local experts for the delivery of programmes, such as Alan Ford.
- The extensive and inclusive volunteer programme.
- Outreach projects such as reminiscence work.
- That events can spill outside into a green space outside the museum [see comment later though as well].
- The facilities that enable visitors to research areas of interest.
- A place to understand yourself within the context of the history of Stevenage.

*'Because it is a New Town, a lot of us don't roots here... they came in as pioneers and that creates a different mindset... I was always looking for a bit of extra roots, and that is what a museum can do.'*

- The fascinating objects that are used to tell the story of Stevenage

#### 2.2.5. What does not work well for the current museum

The focus groups were asked what does not work so well for the current museum and needs to be changed for the new museum. The key issues that were discussed were that the publicity and promotion need improvement, as well as the opening times and staff and financial resources.

It must be noted that these stakeholders, all of whom were very committed to the museum, felt that the museum was currently doing a wonderful job, but the discussions included:

- The current level of resources and staff in the museum is a significant issue:

Claire Adler

Heritage Consultant: Learning, Community, Development

*'The current budgets must be the absolute minimum – they cannot deliver more on what they currently have.'*

*'They are currently underfunded and need more staff, which will cost more.'*

*'The new museum needs more resource and more funding. To be a new museum that is best at what it is, it will need more resource and money... I don't see how you can deliver this new level of development without more resources.'*

- The location of the current museum is not appropriate for a public/ tourist site.
- The opening times are not long enough – in terms of the days it is open and the hours it is open for:

*'If it is not open every day in the town centre then we have got it wrong... and it needs to be open one or two evenings a week.'*

- The current museum cannot accommodate large groups, such as the local three-class entry primary schools.
- There is not a social space for people to stop and spend time in the museum.
- The museum spaces are not currently appropriate for hiring out:

*'No one will pay to hire this space' [education room in current museum].*

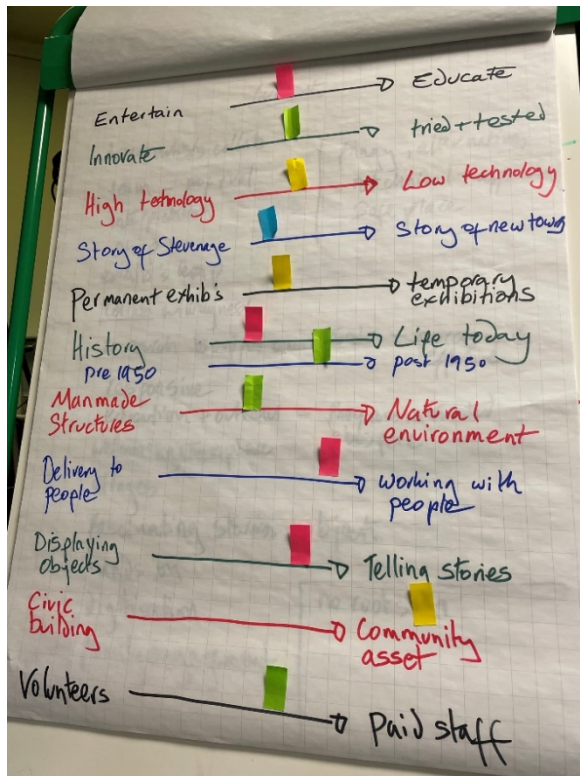
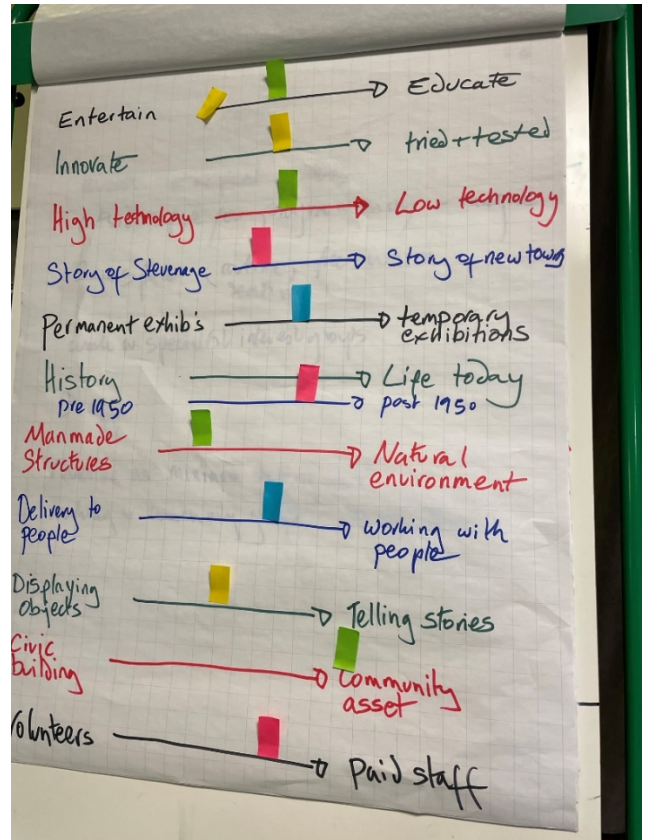
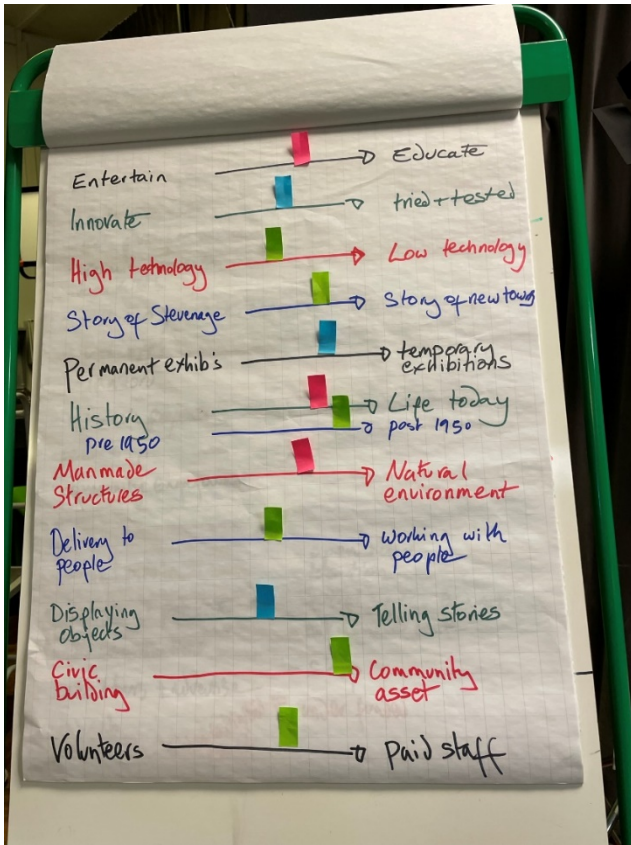
- The current outside space cannot be used:

*'We don't need to take the junkies with us... we can't use the outside space here because there are sharps out there.'*

- There is not a space for film showings with high quality sound.
- The layout of the museum is confusing.
- The museum is not as interactive as it could be.
- There is poor IT infrastructure in the museum.
- The social media and marketing could be more effective.
- The website needs to be improved.
- There is a minimal digital offer, including virtual tours.
- The shop is in a corridor, hard to see what is for sale and is not effective for enticing people to buy anything. They also only have a budget of £200 a year.
- There is not a Friends of Stevenage Museum.

#### 2.2.6. The new museum

Discussions were held about the starting principles of the new museum. The groups were asked where a pointer should go between two binary statements, with each statement being discussed before the pointer was finalised. Below are three photos of the final sliders. They show that there was generally agreement across the three groups that give some very strong indicators of the guiding principles for the museum for the current stakeholders.





To make the decisions about where the pointers should be placed there were some interesting discussions that explain the thinking behind the placements.

All the focus groups felt that the museum needed to use **entertainment to educate** people about the content of the museum, and as such education and entertainment were equally important:

*'Good education is entertaining.'*

*'If you get them in by entertaining them, they are more likely to come back.'*

*'The secret is to educate people without them realising it.'*

The participants generally felt that the museum needed to use the **tried and tested methods** of engagement and developing and delivering museum displays, but there had to be some **innovation** as well. The pride that the local community have in being a 'pioneering' town needs to be visible in the museum, not just through the displays but also in how they are displayed. Therefore, some new techniques need to be developed, but people also need to know that they will also be able to see objects and stories that they are already familiar with. This can also be summarised as there is interest in the museum developed with low risk strategies but there is a commitment to some risk in its development.

*'Tried and tested works but you do need to push boundaries because history is a changing thing.'*

*'If you don't innovate you can often fall behind.'*

*'The curator needs to listen to the community to see what is possible.'*

*'While we have a new building, a new museum ... we really should be innovating.'*

*'Innovation could alienate people.'*

*'You might have some audiences that you are working really well with at the moment, so you need to be careful not to move away from how you work with them.'*

*'In a town there is a tendency to go for tried and tested but ... culturally Stevenage has an incredible legacy of pioneering creativity, underpinned by social progress and this needs to be reflected in the development of the museum.'*

There is, inevitably, caution about using high **technology** in terms of costs and maintenance with many people citing concerns about museum interactives being broken and seeing blank screens. But there is a need for high technology, such as computer interactives, as a means for storytelling, particularly to engage younger visitors. There was also interest in using personal hand held devices to access further information rather than risk having lots of screens that are broken.

*'Low technology portals to engage with high technology stories... you shouldn't have to be tech savvy to understand how exciting the tech is.'*

*'As time goes on high technology can become low technology... it can become obsolete.'*

*'The young only really engage electronically... it is trying to be open to different types of engagement and opportunities.'*

*'There needs to be as much interaction as possible – people will spend more time in the museum if they are engaged.'*

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Heritage Consultant: Learning, Community, Development

*'When families come, they want to interact with each other and not with a screen. It is about putting your phone away when you are here. But I also think there are smart ways of using your phone and technology that allow people to access deeper into the stories. We need to use tech smartly.'*

There was significant discussion about whether the museum should focus on the **history of Stevenage** or **the story of the New Towns**. Although many people want the New Towns story told, overall there was a feeling that the museum should be focused on the story of Stevenage but contextualised in the New Town story. There is also aspiration for the museum to have a national reach, although there is understanding that logistically meeting the Arts Council's accreditation standards for a National Museum would be preventative. Some of the participants therefore felt that the story of New Towns could be told through temporary exhibitions or through a space that is delivered in partnership with the library and archives.

*'We should be the First New Town Museum.'*

*'Could we have a Museum of Stevenage but a separate room of archives or study centre for New Towns... that flows into the library service.'*

*'It needs to have a national reach...'*

*'The existing Stevenage has to be told and the roots of the people need to go back into the old town... we should not forget the origins of Stevenage.'*

*'If it doesn't tell the story of old Stevenage from Neolithic times then it is criminal; it is all context.'*

*'The history of Stevenage should be the starting point, and the new town next but then heavily contextualising that to look at the bigger picture.'*

*'Instead of being a national, which is a red flag for me, we could become a centre for the study of New Towns. Basically, I want us to become bigger than we currently are but we have to be realistic.'*

*'My ambition is that there would be a museum of New Towns that would be an international destination.'*

All the focus groups agreed that the museum should not be entirely made up of **temporary exhibitions**. Instead, there should be **permanent displays** that tell the story of Stevenage and the New Towns with additional temporary exhibition spaces that have touring and community developed exhibitions.

*'I like the idea of temporary exhibitions and I have been to St Albans, and I don't think it is a success and they have three times the staff that we have... instead our spaces need to be flexible and adaptable.'*

*'You need some items that are on permanent display ... that are like your favourite slippers.'*

*'We have to work well with our space, team and funding and having a temporary exhibition based museum really doesn't make sense.'*

*'The temporary exhibition gives you scope for the innovation.'*

*'Some exhibitions that are touring have a real wow factor. We currently can't host larger touring exhibitions, but it definitely would be an aspiration for us.'*

*'We need a strong permanent space but would be good to have a big space for temporary exhibitions that could last four or five months and also a smaller space that is used with communities.'*

*'My instinct is that the temporary exhibitions should be free because otherwise we would have to staff it and also it would exclude some people.'*

*'If there are high profile temporary exhibitions there will need to be secure storage and also appropriate goods lift to get them to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor.'*

*'There should be a space where you can sit and have a cup of tea and not look at an exhibition space.'*

One of the groups felt that there should be an emphasis on **history**, whereas the other two felt that **life today** was the best way to engage audiences in the history of Stevenage. On further discussions all groups felt that the emphasis and focus on the museum should be on post 1950s history. In one of the groups, it was discussed that using the archaeology of the new town could be a way of telling the story of the old town.

*'It needs to resonate with people ... the more it is up to date the more people will be able to relate to the history.'*

*'Most people who live in Stevenage don't care about the new town identity... I think the youngsters don't think about the pioneering spirit, it is beginning to be a distant past.'*

*'To have a community group using it today it must be relevant to their lives.'*

*'As a new resident I am personally fascinated by Stevenage's 20th century history.'*

*'Reminiscing and nostalgia are important.'*

*'If you don't understand the past, how will you understand the present?'*

*'We don't need much on Roman and Anglo Saxon era as they are not Stevenage.'*

*'Use the new town to tell the story of the old town through the archaeology.'*

*'It is easier to engage with people with growing up in Stevenage in the 1970s than farming in the 1760s or Neolithic pot fragments.'*

*'If you focus on the past, it excludes a lot of people who won't see themselves in that past. They won't see themselves in that history.'*

*'We are all immigrants, everyone who came to the new town, has moved from across the UK, and far far further.'*

*'You have to be really careful that it doesn't become too stale and turn it into a museum that only academics come to.'*

The balance of understanding the history of the **manmade structures** and the **natural environment** was felt to be one that the museum could address. It was felt that the green spaces in Stevenage were as important as the buildings and the museum's role could be to get people to value the green spaces.



*'Over Covid it has proven that nature and environment is really important, and it is important that the museum reflects that.'*

*'The ethos of the new town was about healthy living, allotments and things like that and that needs to be included in the displays.'*

*'One of the problems we have with the town is that people associate New Towns with concrete buildings.'*

*'It doesn't matter whether it is the man made buildings or the natural environment – it is the people and their stories that will bring anything we put in the museum alive.'*

When asked if the museum should be **delivering to people**, through talks and exhibitions or **working with people**, to develop projects and co-create exhibitions, there was significant interest in working with people, but it was also acknowledged that some people prefer to simply access information. Therefore, the museum must continue its work with the community whilst also delivering information for those people that do not want to be so deeply engaged with the museum. As a result, there will need to be a mixture of project and co-creation work and also exhibitions and events that people can just drop into.

*'You have to do both to be inclusive for everybody.'*

*'It is all about developing the key relationships with people ... you need to be focussed on a modern way of work... people feel more connected if they are engaged.'*

*'Working with people is resource heavy.'*

*'We need a range of offer according to the different audiences we want to work with and attract.'*

12

All the groups felt that the **objects** are in the museum as a tool for **telling stories**, they are not there to be admired as objects of beauty (apart from the motorbike!) but are generally seen as a way of getting people to understand the stories of people and place.

*'They go hand in hand... display objects in a way that tells stories.'*

*'You need to know the stories to understand the object.'*

*'It is the context and the people that makes the museum.'*

*'You tell the story of the displayed objects.'*

*'That is something we do well now – you can physically interact with our objects, you can play in the 1950s kitchen and pull down the pans.'*

The overwhelming consensus was that the Stevenage Museum of the future needed to continue the work they have been doing by being a **community asset**. rather than a place for telling the **civic story**. This is key to how the museum needs to be developed and delivered in the future as it is about developing and delivering the museum for and with the local communities.

*'It needs to be civic funded, for the community.'*

*'That is the advantage – you can complain about the boiler and find out your history at the same time!'*

*'That is the way the majority of our staff think – they are providing a service to the people of Stevenage. It is a facility for the people.'*

*'Stevenage's moto is 'The heart of a town lies in its people' and the museum needs to be showing this.'*

There was a unanimous agreement that the museum needs **paid staff** to make and manage the museum a professional, high quality organisation, but **volunteers** are essential to the delivery of the service. There is a need for a Friends of Stevenage Museum to support the museum, staff and recruit volunteers.

*'Paid staff are there to do the core stuff that opens the museum, and the volunteers are here to do the nice extras... the volunteers should not have to do the things that aren't nice. They are like your best visitors – they are so committed.'*

*'But we need more staffing resource than we have now.'*

*'You need a good solid core [of paid staff] ... if you are too volunteer based the organisation can fall over very quickly.'*

*'You need to be careful not to devalue the paid staff. We need as many paid staff as possible.'*

*'You need the paid staff, but you also need the volunteers as the backup.'*

*'Volunteers need to be supported well.'*

*'Volunteering offers opportunities for young people ... you have to have experience.'*

*'Volunteers can't be relied on. They have other lives. They are also wanting to move on and go on holiday!'*

*'What is important is not if the museum needs the volunteers, but if the volunteers need the museum. They should not rely on the volunteers labour to open.'*

*'There needs to be a History Society to support the museum.'*

### 2.2.7. Potential ways of working together

The participants were asked how they and their organisations might be interested in working with the new museum.

There is significant belief across all the focus groups that the new Hub building could have a significant impact on Stevenage if the occupants of the building and the wider community of organisations work closely together.

*'The strength of the library and museum is they cut across services. With the new Hub there is a real opportunity to do something that is at the forefront of thinking within the cultural sector of working with health partners, MIND, Age Concern – to be able to work with these audiences by collaborating with them is a real opportunity.'*

*'We know there are not loads of resources to go round but we can collaborate so well. We can be a model of best practice and that is really exciting.'*

The Hertfordshire Archives is the official legal depository for the New Town records, and hold the records of the building of Stevenage, Hemel and Harlow. They are very interested in working closely with the museum to tell these stories and also helping with physically moving the museum and the associated archives, as well as digitising the records. Further discussions are needed with the archives staff about how they can work with the museum.

When projects have been developed that work across organisations in and around Stevenage it is acknowledged that the impact can be far larger than the sum of their parts, such as the previous World War I project and suffragette project. As a result, Stevenage Library and Knebworth House are very interested in working more closely with the museum in the future to develop partnership projects.

MIND would like to continue working with the museum because:

*'...we now know how important creativity is to people's mental health, and how it can support their recovery. ... if we get the resources, we would definitely be up for working with the museum.'*

Junction 7 Creative are very interested in working more closely with the museum:

*'A permanent space with the museum would be great. We are creative producers; we are very nimble and new but the way we are working is co-creation that is absolutely embedded in the community and the town centre. ... joining forces [with the museum] we have an amazing potential that joins up as many people as possible, combining heritage learning with creative expression.'*

14

There was discussion that there would be a Creator Space, that includes 3D printers, digital cutters etc, similar to the one in [St Albans Library](#) in the new Stevenage Library. This could be utilised by the museum and Junction 7 Creative:

*'We will definitely have a Creators Space, as Stevenage is one of the big five libraries in Hertfordshire, and we have been wanting to redevelop for many many years and they will definitely want to make a splash with it.'*

There is scope to explore relationships with BeMe Stevenage, the University of Hertfordshire and local artists who attended the focus groups. Partnerships also need to be developed with local companies that can result in exhibitions, events and projects that can explore Stevenage as a science hub and also address climate change and sustainability.

There were discussions that community groups and community leaders need to be paid for their time and expertise, if they are helping to develop the museum in the future:

*'People cannot be expected to always give their time for free.'*

There is a need for a Library of Things where people/ community based organisations can borrow resources:

*'...wouldn't it be wonderful if there was somewhere where you could access to a kiln, a stage etc that people could borrow.'*

### 2.2.8. Physical infrastructure

There is overwhelming consensus that the museum really needs to be on the ground floor to entice people into the building.

*'At Harlow the museum and gallery is on top of the council offices, you go in and there is really horrible municipal welcome where someone is complaining about their neighbours guttering. The fun bit is upstairs, but you never get to the fun bit because of what you have to get past first.'*

*'People with dementia do not like going in lifts. It has to be as simple as possible – from the door handles, to being able to feel walls. There are probably similarities with other people with disabilities... a ramp between floors would be the solution.'*

*'As long as it is accessible, and can't be difficult to manage, it does not matter if it is on the first floor as well.'*

However, there is an issue with accessibility if there is some of the museum on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor, as not everyone likes using lifts.

*'There is also a psychological barrier about going upstairs'*

There were discussions about how the building needs to spill out into a safe green space around the museum that can be used for education and entertainment. This space could be in the square, an atrium, internal courtyard or it on the roof of the building:

*'You need an outdoor space that you have control over, you can ticket.'*

There were discussions that:

- there should also be a contemporary art gallery in the building;
- there does need to be a museum store on site;
- a large lift is needed for the moving objects about;
- the museum needs to be designed with flexible spaces so it can be used in different ways – so there can be live music played in the galleries, or theatre performances around the museum;
- internal signage is going to be key to understanding how the different spaces work in the building;
- the shop needs to be easily visible and have plenty of space for selling books.

The Hub was seen as a space to inspire people's creativity, both through its design and also by having spaces within it that encourage creativity.

*'The building needs to be aspirational for children.'*

*'It would be good to have a space where people can have a creative response to what they have seen.'*

Outreach to schools, care homes and businesses will still be needed for people who cannot come to the museum.

### 2.2.9. The most important elements to take forward

All the groups were asked what the most important element of the discussions were that needed to be taken forward. All of the groups felt the most important aspect of the current and the future

Claire Adler

Heritage Consultant: Learning, Community, Development

Stevenage Museum is that it is and should be a community asset that needs to be based on the ground floor of the building with additional staff and resources telling the story of Stevenage contextualised by the story of New Towns.

### 3. Implications

From the consultation outlined above the following implications need to be considered for the development of the new Stevenage Museum.

#### 3.1 Building

- There needs to be a museum store onsite that meets [Arts Council Museum Accreditation Standards](#), as well as a larger off site store.
- There needs to be a space for people to do their own research – this will need to be a secure space where documents and objects can be examined.
- There is a need to continue digitising the collections, this will have implications for space and the museum store.
- A green/ outside space is needed for events to be run. This could be in the square outside the museum, an atrium, internal courtyards or it could utilise the roof of the building.
- Ideally the museum would need to accommodate up to 90 school children in one visit in both the museum and the education space.
- There needs to be a space to show films with high quality sound.
- It will be important that the building has the most modern IT infrastructure possible.
- There needs to be a shop that has a reasonable budget for the purchase of goods and books and is designed and delivered so that it will attract visitors.
- The temporary exhibition space could be on the first floor if it has good access, but this space will need to meet Museum Accreditation standards in terms of security and environmental conditions to also enable the Government Indemnity Scheme to be used for the insurance. If the exhibitions are paid for, the space will also need a welcome desk and will need to be staffed.
- If the museum is based over two floors, there will need to be an appropriate goods lift that can carry large items to the first floor.
- The museum will need to be open at least one evening a week with regular events programmed.
- There has to be a Changing Places toilet onsite.

17

In addition, the following ideas need to be considered:

- having a contemporary art gallery in the building to complement the museum;
- having a ramp that can be used to access the different floors, so that stairs and lifts are not needed;
- having a [Library of Things](#);
- having a space for Junction 7 Creatives in the building.

#### 3.2 Museum content

- The museum must be free and continue the tradition of welcoming all.
- The museum must continue being about, for and with the local community. It may be useful for the museum to join the [Of/By/For all network](#).
- The museum needs to have permanent displays that tell the story of Stevenage contextualised within the New Town's movement.
- The museum displays need to be representative of the local community that live in Stevenage today. People need to come into the museum and see representations of people and places that they can relate to, whether they have lived in the town for generations or only recently moved there.

Claire Adler

Heritage Consultant: Learning, Community, Development

- Although there is a need for a chronological understanding of the history of Stevenage, this could be done through the lens of the New Town and seeing the history of the town through archaeology rather than an incremental time line.
- There needs to be a lot of physical interactivity in the museum but people can delve deeper into the stories by using additional information accessible on their own mobile phones.
- The museum displays need to include interactivity with the objects.
- The museum needs to be easy to navigate with high quality internal signage as well as carefully designed storylines.
- There needs to be a space in the museum where people can stop and reflect and connect to each other. (Possibly similar to the [Wellcome Reading Room](#))
- The displays and information about the New Towns movement could be a space that combines the library, archive and museum, and could link into the space for reflection and connection.
- The museum needs to have two temporary exhibition spaces – one for touring or locally produced or high profile temporary exhibitions and one for exhibitions developed specifically with the local communities. (Possibly similar to [Hackney Museum's](#) temporary exhibitions spaces)
- There is interest in high quality temporary exhibitions that would be in the space for four to five months. There are implications of this around security and if they are paid for, how the reception desk will be managed. Therefore if there is a temporary exhibition space it needs to meet national [Accreditation standards](#) and therefore the [Government Indemnity Scheme](#) for the insurance.
- There needs to be plenty of spaces for people to sit and relax without having to feel that they have to spend money.
- The emphasis on the history of Stevenage means realistically that the museum will not have a target audience of people across the UK, it is more likely to be people within a one hour travel time of the museum or with a specialist interest in New Towns or the local history, such as the Vincent Motorbikes.

### 3.3 Programming

- The museum needs to continue and grow the current co-creation programme of working with the local communities to understand and tell the stories of Stevenage.
- To attract young professionals and 30 – 49 year olds workers without children an evening events programme will be needed.
- Programmes need to be developed targeting people without qualifications.
- Programming is needed to target those that have an interest in local history but don't feel that the museum is a place for them.
- There is a lot of interest in the museum working with other cultural venues in the local area to create projects on a single theme.
- There are plans for a [Creator Space](#) in the library that the museum needs to negotiate access to so that they can deliver programmes that include high quality making.

### 3.4 Staff, volunteering and resources

- The current staff and resources are not enough to deliver the current museum; they will both need to grow to deliver the new museum.
- If there is an increase in opening hours and associated events there will need to be an increase in staff accordingly.

- The current volunteers are highly valued and feel integral part of the museum and will be needed in the delivery of the new museum.
- There needs to be a Friends of Stevenage Museum that can access additional funding for the museum and also develop and support new and varied volunteers.
- A Community Steering Group could be established that supports the museum staff and helps to prioritise the future museum.

### 3.5 Promotion and publicity

- A budget is needed to develop a strong brand for Stevenage Museum and to ensure effective marketing to all the target audiences, including those that will travel up to one hour to visit the museum.
- Training and support is needed in delivering high quality social media and marketing.
- The museum needs to link into the coach tour companies that are currently visiting Stevenage to ensure that the museum is one of the key places they will visit on a tour of Stevenage.

## 4. Next steps

Further to the consultation there are deeper conversations and consultations needed:

- A workshop with the museum staff to work out exactly who the target audiences are for the new museum and starting points for working out the implications for the museum.
- Consultation with community groups that are not currently using the museum
- Consultation with young people
- Consultation with non-users
- Consultation with people of black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage (this should be cut across the consultations above).
- Consultation with people living with physical and mental ill health.
- Creation of Community Steering Group for the museum, where people are paid for their time.
- Deeper conversations and partnership agreements need to be drawn up with Hertfordshire Archives and Stevenage Library.
- Consultation with all the potential organisations to be housed in the Hub to see how the organisations can be working together for the future and how this could impact the design of the building.



### 3. Appendix A: Attendees

Alan Ford; Volunteer  
Alina Congreve; Trustee at the Harlow Arts Trust  
Anji Archer; Artist  
Brian Piggott  
Christina Anderson; Early Years teacher and SLICE in local platinum Artsmark  
Craig Maret; Local film maker  
David Martin  
Diane Wenham; Wellbeing Services Manager & Stevenage Helps Team Manager  
Dora Housham; Senior Museum Assistant  
Gary Moyle; Archivist, Herts Archives and Local Studies  
Gerry Strohm; Junction 7 Creatives  
Getrude Acheampong; BeMe Stevenage/ Black Women in Business Awards (BWB)  
Hilary Spiers; Chair of Stevenage Arts Guild  
Hugh Madgin; Local historian  
Jackie Burton; Volunteer  
Jill Wadsworth; Senior Museum Assistant  
John Gardner  
John Prebble; Director, Junction 7 Creatives  
Jo Ward; Museum Manager  
Judy Kinnear  
Kate Johnston; Learning Officer, Stevenage Museum  
Kath Pope; Museum volunteer  
Kevin Johnston  
Lisle Weekes; Ex-volunteer and trainee secondary school teacher  
Martha Lytton Cobbolt; Managing Director, Lytton Enterprises Ltd./Knebworth Estates  
Melissa; Volunteer  
Michelle Lloyd; Stevenage Library  
Nick Mallinger; Cultural Development Officer, Stevenage Borough Council (SBC)  
Pam Pellen; recently retired from being head of Drama and Senior Leader in Cultural Education (SLICE) at Barnwell School  
Pauline Maryan; Volunteer  
Richard Henry  
Sam Daisley; Casual Senior Museum Assistant  
Sharn Tomlinson; CEO, MIND in mid-Herts

20

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Draft recommendations of the Community Select Committee – New Towns Heritage Centre review

Following three formal Committee meetings, an informal meeting and two site visits to other arts centre/museums at Colchester and Milton Keynes the Committee have suggested the following draft recommendations and split them into 5 main key areas of (i) curation and arts programme linked to community engagement and governance; (ii) virtual museums and digital technology linked to the concept of museums without walls; (iii) the building design features linked to the use of technology in the building; (iv) the commercial activity/funding/cost point for entry and (v) developing a hub and spoke approach for arts & historical heritage across the town

From the Members notes of the two site visits on 15 & 22 October and the informal meeting of the Committee on 25 October and the formal meetings of the Committee on 21 September, 3 November and 30 November 2021 the following suggestions and observations were made by Members (*in italics*), which have led to the following draft recommendations:

**Curation (Arts programme)/engagement with the community/ Governance structure**

Curation

- *Curation - Whatever we come up with has to be a mix of: aspirational, informative, inclusive, accessible and affordable to Stevenage people. It is precisely the curating, archiving and sharing of our local new town heritage, the memories and stories, that is worthy of national and international interest.*
- *Co-curating – MK Museum make use of this, but as well as getting ideas from the public they are keen to give over areas of the museum for the public to take on for a time to fill the space – this sounded like a very positive move that Stevenage Museum should look to investigate*
- *Arts Programme at MK – varied. Initially feedback was that the 3 main collections were too cutting-edge, following extensive public engagement have a more varied programme. Charge for the main exhibitions (£9.50 for adults - if it's free people don't value it – Free Tuesday for MK residents) and free access to café/shop and other non-exhibition areas of the building. – (Charging point discussion)*
- *"I think it would be an asset to have a comparable film of Stevenage showing in the new Hub."*
- *Having a unique selling point/exhibition (outside of the New Towns story) could be worth considering – e.g. Mars Rover Space Exploration*

**Draft Recommendation 1 - Curation (Arts programme)/engagement with the community/ Governance structure:**

- (i) Stevenage Museum's curation should continue to be led by the expertise of the Museum Curator and engage with local residents through co-curation projects to provide a mix of: aspirational, informative, inclusive, accessible and affordable museum and arts offers to Stevenage people.

- (ii) As well as a New Towns focus consideration should be given to having a unique selling point/exhibition, outside of the New Towns story, so could be worth considering – e.g. Mars Rover Space Exploration.

### Community Engagement

- *Community engagement - The museum fully embraces the beautiful diversity of Colchester. The inclusivity and diversity attract the community to get involved and contribute to the shows and event. The ideas are being drawn from the community of what they want for the museum. They have events for NHS and key workers, refugee action, religious group, people with disability and private groups.*
- *sense of pride and ownership of the museum from the community*
- *Engaged with the community about what they wanted – Important*

### **Draft Recommendation 2 - Community Engagement:**

It is important that whatever is offered at the Museum or any public art that is provided within the Hub that it is accessible to the whole of the community, so engagement with all members of the local diverse community should happen to see what would they like to have included?

### Management/Governance Structure

- *Management structure - That requires a Stevenage specific partnership approach between SBC as programme lead and arch facilitator, and arts and heritage voluntary and community groups.*
- *Governance structure - The Chair, Cllr Sarah Mead having heard the feedback from Members and the input from John Mead and Jo Ward stated that the success of future bids will depend on the autonomy of the Heritage Centre. The Chair has suggested that the answer to this could be an Arts Board made up of stakeholders similar to the model of The Town Centre board? In this way SBC would still be a major player but the independent voice of the board would assure investors that independent voices are given equal voice? To this end an Arts and Heritage Board on the lines of the Town Centre Board with a mix of stakeholders could be supported by panels of people who are independent and have specialist arts and heritage expertise from Stevenage, Herts and/or Eastern Region. These could be project or programme specific.*
- *Governance Structure - The museum being its own distinct identity, supported by the Council, needed looking at in detail, as it appears that the museum has had funding bids fail due a lack of independence*
- *Solely reliant on volunteers. Only a few members of staff on the payroll – Yes good to have volunteers but not as dependent as MK Museum*

### **Draft Recommendation 3 - Management/Governance Structure:**

That serious consideration is given by the Executive to the New Towns Heritage Centre's governance arrangements, setting up an independent Arts Board to provide autonomy for the Heritage Centre made up of a mix of stakeholders, similar to the model with the Town Centre Board, an Arts Board could be supported by a panel of people who are independent of the Council and have a specialist arts and heritage expertise from Stevenage, Herts and/or the Eastern Region.

### **Museum without walls – Use of technology virtual museum and QR codes around the town**

- *SBC should be thinking of the concept of “Museums without walls”  
Narrative – & Recommendation – Stevenage should aspire to examples - Bristol Know Your Place / historyPin.co.uk / Coventry digital – This shows old maps overlaid over new maps and has various tabs and icons that when clicked on reveal local history of the place, who lived there (Blue Plaque), conservation areas, local authority planning history, audio archive of oral history, photos which the public can add their own records to so it democracies the process.*
- *A dedicated website for the Museum is vital*
- *The Chair stated that the walks/QR codes idea was excellent and officers should consider getting this started ahead of the outcome of the Towns Deal bid process to show the intent of the Council.*
- *Separate funding bid for website software - Jo Ward, Stevenage Museum Curator stated that duplication of effort was a danger as many websites overlap their offer. The cost of the software was in the region of £8.5k, the Chair stated that a possible route to this could be in part bids to Members Local Community Budgets (LCBs), and suggested that Jo contact Paula Mills to enquire about the details. Other routes could be approaching large companies based in Stevenage to see if they can support this heritage project.*
- *Digital collections via a web portal - Jo Ward stated that she was interested in the examples provided by John Mead to pull together digital collections via a web portal where people can access all they need for social history in one place*
- *The pandemic showed that people want to access info and some experiences online*
- *Only 10% of a museum’s physical collection can be seen at a time*
- *There are reasons why you might want to not handle documents physically due to their fragile nature*

### **Draft Recommendation 4 - Museum without walls – Use of technology virtual museum and QR codes around the town:**

- (i) That the Executive consider, as well as a physical New Towns Heritage Centre as part of the new Civic Hub building in the regenerated Town Centre, pursuing the concept of “Museums without walls”. This could include providing funding from the Towns Deal fund or Members Local Community Budgets (LCB) towards a dedicated website for the Museum that is independent of the Council’s website. It was quoted that with the existing Council website to have compressed digital photos with the current provider would cost in the region of £8.5k. This initiative could be pursued in parallel to the main Towns Deal bid/New Towns Heritage Centre, and would incorporate QR codes around the town. The “Museum without walls” concept would include a strong web presence similar to the examples shown at Bristol Know Your Place, which included digital collections via a web portal and was very interactive for users. It was suggested by the AD Communities & Neighbourhoods that a “museums without walls” bid to external funding bodies would be more likely to be successful if it was a joint bid with other New Towns, so it is recommended that it is pursued in this way.
- (ii) That the Executive considers approaching the City Design Group regarding purchase of the digital maps of areas revealing history through the ages to reveal what the area/town looked like in the past, which could be linked to the joint bid above.

## **Building – design features – use of technology in the building**

- *Design features - The wall dividers that can make the room smaller or bigger according to the needs.*
- *Environmental and Energy saving - t's expensive to run with the cost of energy bills due to materials used (lighting and others ) and lack of Solar Panel. This is something that was significantly highlighted for us to think and plan well.*
- *Design features - keen on the touch screen information that were in use at Colchester Castle Museum*

## **Design features –**

- *The Museum space would have to be agreed in advance with the permanent exhibit areas well thought through so that the Museum doesn't get crowded out by other uses*
- *Having a mixed use/flexible building is very useful so moveable internal walls would be very favourable*
- *Had QR codes to give information of the gallery viewing you were entering. The gallery had tablets on the wall to give further information and to provide interactivity.*

## **Milton Keynes:**

- *Gallery in city centre but in my opinion not well advertised around the shopping mall where it was next to - \*Signage and visual clues to where the building is and what's in it will be important*
- **MUST HAVE A CAFÉ**
- *Design features - Cinema – Both sites visited at Colchester and Milton Keynes had a cinema which provided a great Arts asset and way of making income. Both have a contract with Curzon for the cinema – varied programme including family orientated programme as well as art house. If possible would be a very good feature for Hub/New Town's Heritage Centre as this makes money and pays for other activities.*
- *Design features – Environmental Carbon Neutral Building*
- *Key feature of the new build part of the Museum will be use of digital images. The example below on the left is from Milton Keynes Museum and on the right is what a possible space image linked to Stevenage's space industry could look like*



**Draft Recommendation 5 - Building – design features – use of technology in the building:**

- (i) That the Executive consider as part of the New Towns Heritage Centre 21<sup>st</sup> Century design features. The building should have the highest possible environmental credentials and be a carbon neutral building and incorporate the use of technology in the building. The building should incorporate:
- Have a mixed use/flexible building with wall dividers that can make the room smaller or bigger according to the needs
  - Provide touch screen information points
  - Provide digital images as visitors walk through different spaces – (example provided of Mars Rover space vehicle)
  - The Museum space should be agreed in advance with the permanent exhibit areas well thought through so that the Museum doesn't get crowded out by other uses
  - A small seated cinema would be very desirable feature as a draw for visitors as well as an income stream. Members are aware that this would be an expensive capital outlay but could be a major asset in the future
  - Lessons from the sites visited showed the value of having an on-site Café as a place for people to visit and provide a positive user experience

**Commercial activity/Funding/Cost point for entry**

- *Cost Entry Fee - free entry museum to encourage everyone to visit but there's a bank card tap station for donations. contactless payment/donation points*
- *Commercial activity - events, theatre (livestream) and other activities that raised money*
- *Commercial activity - There should be places in the building for commercial activity with a profit share with the Council. This could include small start-up linked businesses to provide spaces to sell their services such as on site catering etc. and spaces for new/young artists to display their work and sell it*
- *Hiring out of the building at specific times could be an option for extra income if it is seen as being a desirable space for events etc. so the design/architecture needs to be very attractive as well as environmentally friendly- (make this a selling point)*
- *Should run at least at break-even "wash its face" and not rely on a large subsidy such as Firstsite has*

*Narrative - The Community use of the building and engagement with content and activities was very good but the core activities/financial offer needs to be as secure as possible to make this possible*

- *Funding - go directly to the big companies, and major developers, under their corporate social responsibility agendas for grants and sponsorship*
- *Commercial activity - careful consideration of the future revenue funding options, some of this could come from commercial activity as well as private hire events and functions but she favoured the core offer to remain free with community*

activities supported and the option to seek support from the business community should be a recommendation to be pursued.

- *MUST HAVE A CAFÉ*
- *Narrative - What we need is a successful Museum that provides a gallery, business incubator, cinema and café that enables us to tell the story of Stevenage.*

#### **Draft Recommendation 6 - Commercial activity/Funding/Cost point for entry:**

- (i) That the Executive consider the possible Commercial activities associated with the New Towns Heritage Centre. During the site visits Members were taken with the crucial role that various commercial activities can do to support the users of the building: This could include:
- Irrespective of the whether free or not for entry, contactless payment/donation points for bank card use should be provided at various points around the building
  - events, theatre (livestream) and other activities that raised money for other non – commercial activities in the Heritage Centre
  - There should be places in the building for commercial activity with a profit share with the Council. This could include small start-up linked businesses to provide spaces to sell their services such as on site catering etc. and spaces for new/young artists to display their work and sell it
  - Hiring out of the building at specific times could be an option for extra income
  - Officers supported by Members should go directly to the big companies, and major developers, under their corporate social responsibility agendas for grants and sponsorship
  - There should definitely be a Café that is either run in-house to provide income for the building or is run under a profit share by a tenant to bring in income
  - Having a unique selling point/exhibition (outside of the New Towns story) could be worth considering – e.g. Mars Rover Space Exploration (linked to recommendation 5)

#### Funding Bids:

- (ii) Linked to the suggestions for joint funding bids that are detailed under Use of technology – museums without walls at recommendation 4, the Executive are asked to appraise the feasibility of museums without walls and to explore funding steams with potential partners.
- (iii) That the Executive consider approaching the 20th Century Society for a bid to support and promote the 20<sup>th</sup> Century building heritage of the New Town.
- (iv) That there be a bid to English Heritage with reference to the Fairlands Valley Farmhouse as part of Stevenage’s Cultural Heritage linking it to its pre-New Towns history and heritage, to preserve the building and make it part of Stevenage’s heritage offer, incorporating artefacts from the Museum’s collection depicting past trades and farming and utilising it as a venue for school workshops.

#### **Developing a hub and spoke approach for arts & historical heritage across the town**

- *Hub and Spoke - We should maybe adopt a hub and spokes model that makes best use of our CNM and Play Services infrastructure, i.e. in our neighbourhoods, as well as the few remaining historic structures like Fairlands Valley Farmhouse, even Rooks Nest (E.M.*



*Forster)*

**Draft Recommendation 7 - Developing a hub and spoke approach for arts & historical heritage across the town:**

That the Executive consider continuing a hub and spoke model which makes best use of our CNM and Play Services infrastructure, i.e. in our neighbourhoods which would support the main hub core offer at the New Towns Heritage Centre.

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Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities

**Towns Fund: Project Adjustment Requests  
Frequently Asked Questions  
Updated July 2023**

**The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has recently introduced a delegated Project Adjustment Request (PAR) process for some of its Levelling Up programmes. Following this announcement, we have updated the Towns Fund PAR guidance and republished some general principles and criteria for places making changes to their projects.**

**In our experience, early engagement between the Department and Accountable Bodies makes for a more streamlined process and reduces the likelihood of further information being requested once a PAR is submitted. If you are thinking of making a change to a project, you should engage in the first instance with your CLGU Area Lead and/or Towns Fund central team lead. This will help determine whether a PAR is required and, if so, whether it is a delegated decision or requires Departmental approval.**

**This guidance covers both Town Deals and Future High Streets Fund (FHSF). However, as FHSF is in its final year of delivery we do not expect places to make significant changes to projects and would encourage local authorities to focus on delivering agreed plans by programme-end.**

**This guidance includes:**

- 1. What constitutes a Project Adjustment Request (PAR)?**
- 2. What is out of scope for a PAR?**
- 3. What criteria PARs need to meet?**
- 4. How are PARs assessed?**
- 5. How to Submit PARs**

## 1. What constitutes a Project Adjustment Request (PAR)?

Project adjustments include but are not limited to:

- An overall change of scope.
- Re-scoping of outputs/outcomes.
- Change to a project's Towns Fund funding amount.
- Change to a project's match funding amount (if this impacts on outputs and outcomes).
- Movement of funds between projects within the programme.
- Merging projects or splitting projects into multiple interventions.
- Cancellation of projects.
- A change in location.

## 2. What is out of scope for a PAR?

- **Solely moving project funding across years with no change to planned outputs and outcomes, for example as a result of delivery slippage.** There is no need to submit as part of a PAR as this is reconciled via our performance reporting process and reflected in subsequent payments. However, if you are submitting a PAR because your project outputs and/or scope have changed then you **should** include a revised financial profile. This will provide assurance that your changes remain deliverable before programme end as we cannot agree to project changes that go beyond the stated spend deadlines.
- **New projects** – new projects are no longer allowed to be brought into the programme during the delivery stage. If a project does need to be cancelled, a reallocation of funding to ensure the successful delivery of other projects is permitted subject to meeting the PAR criteria. If you are unsure whether your proposal constitutes an entirely new project, please contact the Department.  
**Changing a project's name** - This can be amended by informing your area and central team contacts or via the performance reporting process.

## 3. What criteria do PARs need to meet?

A PAR form should be submitted which includes your most recently approved project baseline and the changes you want to make to that.

The PAR should also meet the following criteria:

### Town Deals:

- The changes have been approved by the Town Deal Board, which includes the local MP
- The project can be delivered and spend achieved by 31 March 2026
- The project BCR is above 1. For BCRs close to 1 you may be required to submit additional information.
- The change has Section 151 Officer approval
- The changes do not exceed the town's funding envelope

- Outputs and outcomes are consistent with the themes set out in Town Investment Plans
- Changes align with the strategic priorities set out in Town Investment Plans

#### **FHSF:**

- Investment is within the parameters of the Fund
- FHSF funding will be spent by 31 March 2024
- Overall proposal has co-funding
- A review of the overall proposal will be undertaken to ensure it meets minimum BCR of 2:1 or 1.5:1 provided there is a strong strategic case
- No more than 5% on 'beautification'
- The change has approval from LA SRO and Section 151 officer
- Addresses Market Failure: market failure arises where the market fails to deliver regeneration and infrastructure and the public sector is required to intervene as a result

#### **4. How are PARs assessed?**

**The section below covers the recently announced delegations, as well as how changes to financial profiles will be dealt with. There are now two routes for assessment and approval of PARs, both routes require a PAR form to be submitted to the Towns Fund team at DLUHC**

##### **Route 1: Delegated:**

The following changes can be agreed by Town Deal Boards and Accountable Bodies, provided they meet the Acceptable PAR criteria set out at Section 3:

- Up to 30% change to agreed project outputs and outcomes
- 30% flexibility to move spend across years (although please see Question 2 on what to do if your PAR solely relates to slippage across financial years)
- Reallocating up to 30% of project funding to another project within the specific Towns Fund programme, provided:
  - i) the change does not exceed 30% of the source project value.
  - ii) the projects remain good value for money as per the requirements of each fund and,
  - iii) outputs, outcomes and spend timetable (approved Annex A-1) do not move or reduce by more than 30%.

##### **We are unable to accommodate movement of funding between Future High Streets Fund and Town Deals.**

The delegations only apply to outputs and outcome indicators that have already been agreed with the Department. Therefore, if your PAR is removing an agreed output and adding a new activity this would need to be submitted to DLUHC for approval as it could be fundamentally different to what was originally agreed.

Some worked examples are included at **Appendix A** as a guide to what would or wouldn't be considered a delegated change. However, we also recommend early engagement with the Department which will help identify the decision-making route.

In exceptional circumstances, the Department may "call in" projects for review. This could be where there is considerable local disagreement, or the changes are novel and contentious. It could also apply if the PAR is considered to be a material change on the original project agreement. However, we would notify places if this is the case.

For delegated PARs, you should still complete the PAR form and submit it to the Towns Fund central inbox. Whilst DLUHC is not formally approving these PARs, it is important for monitoring purposes that we are aware of the changes you are making (see Question 5).

### **Route 2: Standard:**

PARs above the delegations set out above should be submitted to DLUHC for approval in the usual way. We will aim to ensure that all approvals take place within 20 working days.

This will be measured by calculating the time from which a review commences to receiving approval notification: therefore, it will not be from the point of submission but from the point the Department has triaged the form and confirmed no further information is required from the local authority before the PAR is assessed. As noted previously in this guidance, early engagement with DLUHC will minimise the risk that approvals are delayed due to missing information. We will notify you if your PAR approval is likely to take longer than 20 working days.

## **5. How to Submit PARs**

For Delegated and Standard PARs:

- Please use the following forms: [Town Deals PAR](#) or [FHSF PAR](#), and,
- Submit to [towns.fund@levellingup.gov.uk](mailto:towns.fund@levellingup.gov.uk), copying your local Area and/or Central Lead.
- Indicate in the body of the email if you consider your PAR to be a delegated change.

**APPENDIX A – Examples of Delegated / Standard PARs.**

**Delegated PAR**

Due to cost increases **Town A** is reducing the length of Cycle & Walking routes by 30%. This is part of a wider regeneration project which will also create a 1000m<sup>2</sup> public square, plant trees and develop shop units. This change forms one element of multiple developments. Therefore, the change can be seen as minor and the route to approval is via the local authority as the accountable body.

Outputs – Town A	Current	Revised
Length of new cycle ways	2km	1.4km
Length of new pedestrian paths	2km	1.4km
Created new Public Realm	1000m <sup>2</sup>	1000m <sup>2</sup>
Trees planted	15	15
Commercial Units	5	5

**Town C** is progressing with a project and would now like to incorporate an area of land adjacent to the building they are renovating. As there is no change to the original outputs and the change will provide additionality for no extra costs, the change can be seen as minor and the route to approval is via the local authority as the accountable body.

Outputs – Town C	Current	Revised
Heritage buildings renovated or restored	1	1
Trees planted	10	20
Existing parks improved	1	2

**Standard PAR**

**Town B's** 1000m<sup>2</sup> of rehabilitated land will no longer be delivered through the programme **but** the project will retain the public realm outputs. The loss of outputs forms a key element of the proposed project. It is therefore a significant change to the projects scope requiring DLUHC approval.

Outputs – Town B	Current	Revised
Public Ream	1000m <sup>2</sup>	1000m <sup>2</sup>
Amount of rehabilitated land	1000m <sup>2</sup>	0

**Town D** needs to move location for one project, instead of developing a commercial space to support businesses, the space will now provide a community training space. There is a swap between outputs for (current) enterprises assisted and (new) learners enrolled. The changes still fit within the strategic objectives of the programme and the town's TIP. However, this is a significant change to the scope of the project and the route to approval is via DLUHC.

Outputs – Town D	Current	Revised
Heritage buildings renovated restored	1	0
Improved cultural facilities	0	1
Enterprises assisted	20	0
Learners enrolled	0	300



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