

Public Document Pack



CABINET

Date: Wednesday, 12 February 2025

Time: 2.00pm,

Location: Council Chamber

Contact: Lisa Jerome 01438 242203

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

AGENDA

PART 1

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MINUTES - CABINET 15 JANUARY 2025

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 15 January 2025.

Page Nos. 5 - 14

3. MINUTES OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY AND SELECT COMMITTEES

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

Community Select Committee – 28 November 2024 and 8 January 2025

Environment and Economy Select Committee – 12 December 2024 and 14 January 2025

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 17 December 2024 and 21 January 2025

Page Nos. 15 - 64

4. FINAL SOSAFE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

To consider the final version of the draft Community Safety Strategy 2025-28, which outlines the emerging priorities of the SoSafe partnership for the next three years.

Page Nos. 65 - 128

5. FINAL GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2025/26

Report to follow.

6. FINAL CAPITAL STRATEGY 2024/25 - 2029/30

To approve revisions to the 2024/25 General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme and Strategy and approve the Capital Programme for 2025/26.

Page Nos. 129 - 160

7. ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2025/26

To recommend to Council the approval of the Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26, including its Annual Investment Strategy, Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy.

Page Nos. 161 - 198

8. ADOPTION OF THREE REVISED SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENTS

To consider a report providing Members with an overview of changes to three Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and to adopt the three amended SPDs: Parking Provision, Developer Contributions and Design Guidance SPDs.

Page Nos. 199 - 224

9. VULNERABILITY POLICY

To consider the draft Housing Service Vulnerability Policy 2025-2027 in line with good practice and the expectations from the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman Service to ensure that the Council is compliant with legislation and has a clear focus on addressing vulnerability within housing services.

Page Nos. 225 - 256

10. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

To consider any Part 1 business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

11. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

To consider the following motions –

1. That under Section 100(A) 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.

12. PROCUREMENT OF SUPPORT CONTRACTORS FOR THE REPAIRS AND VOIDS SERVICE

To seek approval to award contracts in respect of the procurement of support contractors for the Council's Repairs and Voids service.

Page Nos. 257 – 270

13. 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 Wednesday, 12 February 2025 –

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

Agenda Published 4 February 2025

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 15 January 2025

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Richard Henry (Chair), Jeannette Thomas (Vice Chair), Sandra Barr, Lloyd Briscoe, Jackie Hollywell, Conor McGrath, Loraine Rossati and Simon Speller

Start / End Time: Start Time: 2.00pm
End Time: 2.55pm

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

There were no apologies for absence and no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - CABINET - 11 DECEMBER 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 11 December 2024 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

3 **GARAGES ASSET MANAGEMENT REPORT**

Cabinet received a report on the Garage Asset Management Programme.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance advised that since the commencement of the Garage Improvement Programme in 2016, the number of garage voids had reduced and income had increased. During the next phase of the programme, it was proposed that the focus would be on the planned replacement of asbestos roofs and day to day repairs and maintenance.

Members were in support of the proposals in the report and agreed that garages were pivotal to the Council's future income.

It was noted that although the voids figures of garages had decreased considerably, the ultimate ambition was to secure zero voids. Cabinet was also advised that best use of the garage sites would always be carefully considered including the potential for some locations to be repurposed for Housing Development. As a cross cutting key council issue, the Portfolio Holder stated that Member oversight could be provided via an approach similar to the Executive Housing Board.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. The Council's new Garage Asset Management Plan 2025 to 2035, set out at Appendix A to the report be approved.

2. That the financial plan as set out in paragraph 4.20 to 4.30 to help support the delivery of the plan be approved.
3. Council be recommended to approve a £4.5Million budget for planned preventive maintenance (PPM) asbestos roof replacements over 7 years.
4. Council be recommended to approve a budget of £250K per annum for the life of the plan (ten years) for reactive capital repairs, and that will be built into the Capital Strategy 2025/26.
5. That it be noted that an increase in garage income of £179K as identified in paragraph 4.28 of the report, to be incorporated in the final General Fund (GF) Budget 2025/26 report that will be presented to the February 2025 Cabinet to fund:
 - i. An increase in the reactive revenue repairs budget of £29k to £120k per annum.
 - ii. The remaining £150K to support the cost of borrowing.
6. That the proposed procurement route for a new repair works contract as outlined in paragraphs 4.4 to 4.7 of the report be approved.
7. That a specialist asbestos contractor be appointed to undertake the replacement of asbestos roofs, as outlined in paragraphs 4.8 to 4.13 of the report.
8. That the Strategic Director (RP), after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation, be given delegated authority, to award and finalise the terms of both contracts.
9. That disposal of garage sites will come back to Members on a case-by-case basis for decision.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

4 **COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY 2025 - 28**

Cabinet received a report considering the draft Community Safety Strategy for 2025-8 which outlined the emerging priorities of the SoSafe Partnership for the next three years.

The Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities outlined the critical work being done in this area to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the community. He advised that the Council and its partners had continued to work together to tackle anti-social behaviour and crime by delivering initiatives supporting some of the most vulnerable people in the town making best use of partners' resources and targeting them effectively. This strategy would build upon that progress.

The Chief Executive reiterated that the Council benefitted from great support from partners including the Police, Fire and Rescue and the Probation Service and their contributions to the SoSafe Partnership were strongly welcomed. He advised that with the help of the Head of Community Advice and Support and her Team, £2.2million had been secured towards the activities of the Partnership over the last three years which was a huge achievement.

Members were supportive of the continued commitment by the Council and partners to make Stevenage a safer place.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Community Safety Strategy (the Strategy) accompanying the report for onward transmission to Council be approved and;
2. That the work of the SoSafe Partnership in both the development and delivery of the Strategy be noted.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

5 **LICENSING ACT 2003 - REVIEW OF STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY**

Cabinet received a report relating to a review of the Statement of Licensing Policy which the Council as the Licensing Authority had a duty under section 5 of the Licensing Act 2003 to prepare and publish every 5 years.

Members were advised that the revised policy statement had been subject to a 28 day consultation period where two responses had been received resulting in very minor wording changes which were outlined in the report.

It was noted that this matter had been considered by the General Purposes Committee where it had been agreed that the Policy should be amended to grant powers to Licensing Officers, the Licensing Manager and the Head of Environmental Health and Licensing in their capacity as the 'Licensing Authority'. Officers advised that a revision to the Constitution would be made to reflect this amendment.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. That the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Licensing Act Statement of Licensing Policy 2025-2030, attached at appendix A to the report be approved.
2. That the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Statement of Licensing Policy be recommended to Council for adoption.
3. That it be recommended to Council that Licensing Officers, the Licensing Manager and the Head of Environmental Health and Licensing, in their capacity as 'The Licensing Authority', be approved to act on behalf of the Council as a Responsible Authority as prescribed in the Licensing Act 2003 (13.4 & 69.4).
4. That it be noted that sections 6.3.1 and 16.6.5 of the draft policy have been amended accordingly to remove any wording which conflicts with the above proposed recommendation.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

6 **GAMBLING ACT 2005 - REVIEW OF STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES**

Cabinet considered a report reviewing the Gambling Act 2005 Statement of Principles which, the Council as the Licensing Authority had a duty under Section 349 of the gambling Act 2005 to prepare and publish.

Members were advised that the principle proposed changes related to formatting, declaration amendments, addressing typographical errors and the updating of contact details. The 28-day consultation period resulted in five responses received which involved minor wording changes outlined in the report.

It was noted that the draft statement of principles had been considered by the General Purposes Committee which did not propose any further amendments.

Members were in support of the Policy and agreed the importance of the Council's responsibility to vulnerable residents.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Gambling Act Statement of Principles 2025-2028 (attached at appendix A) be approved.
2. That the Stevenage Borough Council draft Statement of Principles be recommended to Council for adoption.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

7 **CONSULTATION ON AN AMENDMENT TO TWO ARTICLE 4 DIRECTIONS TO REQUIRE CHANGES OF USE FROM CLASS E(G)(I) (OFFICES AND CLASS E(G)(III) (LIGHT INDUSTRIAL) TO CLASS C3 (RESIDENTIAL) TO OBTAIN PLANNING PERMISSION**

Cabinet received a report relating to an amendment to two Article 4 Directions which included protection to existing employment uses within the Gunnels Wood and Pin Green Employment Areas.

Officers advised that the public consultation on the Amended Directions would commence on 22 January 2025 for a minimum of 4 weeks before resubmission to Cabinet in March seeking approval of the Article 4 Directions. It was also noted that there had been no substantive comments received from the Planning and Development Committee on this matter.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the reason for the amendment to the existing Article 4 Directions be noted, and that there are no changes to the areas of the existing Article 4 Directions which came into force on 16 December 2022.
2. That the amendment of the Article 4 Directions under Article 4 (I) of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended), to remove permitted development rights in relation to changes of

use from Use Class E(g)(i) and E(g)(iii) to Use Class C3 (as defined in the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended)).

3. That the public consultation on the made (revised) Article 4 Directions, for a minimum period of four weeks commencing from 22 January 2025 be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

8 **COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL): DRAFT CHARGING SCHEDULE – PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

Cabinet received a report on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Draft Charging Levy.

Cabinet was reminded that CIL money allowed local authorities to raise funds from developers undertaking new building projects which could be used to fund a wide range of infrastructure needed as a result of the development taking place.

Members were advised that the CIL rates proposed were in line with the current indexed figures which should help ensure that the Council could provide the infrastructure needed to support growth.

It was noted that the public consultation would commence on 22 January for a minimum period of four weeks prior to submission to the Secretary of State for Examination. Officers advised that no substantive comments had been received from the Planning and Development Committee.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. That the feedback from the first round of consultation on the CIL Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule (PDCS) be noted.
2. That the CIL Draft Charging Schedule (attached as Appendix A) be approved for the second round of public consultation, for a minimum period of four weeks commencing from 22 January 2025.
3. That delegated authority be approved to progress to Submission of the revised Charging Schedule to Government, should representations at the second round of consultation result in minor amendments to the CIL Charging Schedule.
4. That delegated powers be granted to the Assistant Director Planning and Regulation, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance, to make such amendments as are necessary in the final preparation of the Draft Charging Schedule.
5. That it be noted that there were no substantive comments received from the Planning & Development Committee.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

9 **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) - FINAL BUDGET AND RENT SETTING 2025/26**

Cabinet received a report presenting the Final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget for 2025/26.

Members were advised that the report proposed a 2.7% increase in dwelling rents. Service charges had been based on cost recovery or actual costs, with the largest increases being driven by utility costs.

The final budget would ensure support to the achievement of the Council's key housing priorities and ensure the continued delivery of high-quality housing services.

Members noted the Chief Finance Officer Statement within the report which advised of the significant pressures on the HRA from repairs and voids and that additional measures had been taken to reflect this.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing also advised that the Council would be investing £51million, with nearly £28million on desperately needed new social and affordable homes.

That it be **RESOLVED** that the following proposals be recommended to Council on 22 January 2025

1. That HRA dwelling rents be increased (week commencing 1 April 2025) by 2.7%. This equates to an average increase of £3.21 for social rents, £5.02 for affordable rents and £3.94 for Low Start Shared Ownership homes per week (based on a 52-week year).
2. That the 2025/26 service charges are approved as set out in paragraph 4.2.
3. That the HRA budget for 2025/26, set out in Appendix A, is approved.
4. The 2025/26 growth options as set out in section 4.4 are approved.
5. That the additional repair pressures of £2,674,860, as set out in 4.4.6, and the net salary savings of £551,920 at 4.4.10, are approved to be included in the working budget for 2024/25.
6. That the 2025/26 Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix B are noted.
7. That the revised minimum levels of balances for 2025/26 shown in Appendix C are approved.
8. That Members note the Rent Increase Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIA) appended to this report in Appendix D and the Rent Flexibility EqIA in Appendix F.
9. That Members note the Aids and Adaptations Policy Equalities Impact Assessments appended to this report in Appendix E.

10. That the contingency sum of £500K, within which the Cabinet can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2025/26 (£400K in 2024/25) as set out in paragraph 4.9.3.
11. That the decisions taken on recommendations 2.1 – 2.10 above be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework rules in the Council's Constitution.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

10 **DRAFT GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2025/26**

Cabinet received a report updating members on next year's draft General Fund budget including the Government finance settlement and the level of savings required and achieved through the Making Stevenage Even Better Balancing the Budget Programme.

Members were advised that none of the savings proposed would result in any cuts to services. The proposed increase to Council tax was 2.99% equating to £7.15 per year on a band D rated property.

Members were also pleased to support a number of growth bids including one related to the important graffiti removal programme and the partnership with Junction 7 Creatives to produce a programme of art around the Town, alongside a much needed apprentice and graduate programme.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. The 2024/25 revised net expenditure on the General Fund of **£12,248,970** be approved as set out in paragraph 4.8.1.
2. The draft General Fund Budget for 2025/26 of **£9,910,330** be proposed for consultation purposes, with a contribution from balances of **£77,949** and a Band D Council Tax of **£246.41**, (assuming a 2.99% Council Tax increase).
3. The updated position on the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as summarised in section 4.10 be noted.
4. The minimum level of General Fund reserves of **£3,421,625**, which is in line with the 2025/26 risk assessment of balances, as shown at Appendix E to this report, be approved.
5. The contingency sum of **£500,000** within which the Cabinet can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2025/26, (reflecting the level of balances available above the minimum amount).
6. The 2025/26 Balancing the Budget options as set out in section 4.5 and Appendix A, totalling **£275,907** and **£29,651** for the General Fund and HRA respectively, be included into the Council's budget setting processes for consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
7. The new food waste collection and legal fees and charges as set out in paragraph 4.5.6 (and Appendix B) be approved.

8. The use of Business Rate reserve to fund a Graduate and Apprentice scheme as set out in section 4.6 be approved for inclusion in the 2025/26 General Fund (**£202,760**).
9. That a first call on underspends of **£150,000** (in total from the General Fund and HRA) be approved to support the Graduate and Apprentice scheme as set out in section 4.6.
10. That the growth bid for graffiti removal of **£75,000** as set out in section 4.6 be approved.
11. That the pressures identified in sections 4.2 and 4.7 to this report be noted.
12. That the Section 25 Statement on Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserve as set out in Appendix F be approved.
13. That the decisions taken on recommendations 2.2 – 2.11 above be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework rules in the Council's Constitution.
14. That the Equalities Impact Assessment appended to this report for the new fees and charges (Appendix C & D) be noted.
15. That engagement to take place with key partners and other stakeholders in order for their views to be considered as part of the 2025/26 budget setting process be approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

11 **DRAFT CAPITAL STRATEGY 2024/25-2029/30**

Cabinet received a report introducing the draft Capital Strategy for 2025/26 which was subject to consultation prior to coming back to Cabinet and Council for formal approval in February 2025.

Members noted that the Council's Financial Security Group had supported new scheme proposals totalling £2.6million which were all fully funded.

It was **RESOLVED** that

1. The draft General Fund Capital Budget for 2025/26 of £37Million, as set out in Appendix C to the report, be approved.
2. The Consultation responses in relation to General Fund proposed growth bids by the Council Financial Security Group (CFSG) 19 November 2024, be considered (section 4.14).
3. Draft HRA Capital Budget for 2025/26 of £51.3Million, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be approved.
4. Updated forecast of resources 2025/26 be approved, General Fund section 4.4, HRA section 4.9.

5. General Fund capital budget virement of £40,000 from the deferred works reserve to fund boiler replacement and hot water systems work at Ridlins be approved (paragraph 4.2.3).
6. Approach to resourcing the General Fund capital programme as outlined in the report (Paragraph 4.4) be approved.
7. General Fund growth bids identified for inclusion in the Capital Strategy (paragraph 4.2, and Appendix A to the report) be approved in principle, including the increase in the deferred works reserve budget of £282K (section 4.2).
8. Budget for the refitting of the space currently occupied by the indoor market for re-letting and the capital works to make the new indoor market location at Park Place fit for purpose (paragraphs 4.8.1 and 4.8.2) be approved.
9. Community infrastructure levy of up to £5Million, can be used to fund future infrastructure projects as outlined in paragraph 4.6.1.
10. HRA budget changes identified for inclusion in the Capital Strategy (section 4.9 and Appendix B to the report) be approved.
11. Approach to resourcing the HRA capital programme as outlined in the report (Paragraph 4.10) be approved.
12. The approved capital de-minimis expenditure limit of £10,000 (section 4.11 of the report) be noted; and
13. The approved revenue surplus in any year of up to £500K that can be allocated to the capital reserve to support capital expenditure be noted.

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

12 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

13 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That, under Section 100(A) 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 involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 to 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.

2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

14 **MINUTES - CABINET 11 DECEMBER 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the Cabinet held on 11 December be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

15 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 28 November 2024

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren (Vice Chair), Stephen Booth, Kamal Choudhury, Alistair Gordon and Mason Humberstone

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.50pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Leanne Brady, Akin Elekolusi, Lynda Guy and Jade Woods.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 4 NOVEMBER 2024

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Community Select Committee held on 4 November 2024 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 HOUSING DAMP & MOULD UPDATE

The Committee received a presentation giving an update on the scrutiny review of Damp and Mould from the Disrepair and Damp and Mould Manager.

The Committee was advised that in relation to the performance of the service:

- a target of 20 days for all building work order requests had been established;
- For November the work order KPI performance stood at 83.64%;
- There were currently 114 active work orders related to D&M;
- The average cost per job was approximately £1,735;
- Any overdue work orders were primarily linked to roofing issues or instances where access had not been granted by the tenant.

Officers informed the Committee that to ensure that the service remained fit for purpose a review of the policy would be undertaken alongside a stock condition survey programme and the adoption of a case management approach. Further developments included air quality monitors, use of technology and alternative wall finishes.

It was noted that 100% of pre and post inspections were carried out by inhouse inspectors with 3 and 6 month follow on inspections to ensure works had been effective.

In relation to resources, Members were advised that a review of staffing resources had been completed in May 2024. The Disrepair and Damp and Mould teams had been combined and merged into a single team. Recruitment was in progress to make permanent appointments to new and agency filled roles and the procurement of support contractors was in progress.

In order to enhance responsiveness and support for tenants, staff within the Customer Service Centre (CSC) communicated daily with the D&M team. Direct line of communication had been established, including mobile contacts, to ensure immediate assistance for tenant inquiries and requests.

Officers advised that while progress in tackling D&M concerns was being made, it was believed that there was significant potential for strengthening communication and alignment with the Decent Homes Programme and the repairs team. By working collaboratively, the service would be enhanced and better outcomes achieved.

In response to a number of questions, Officers responded as follows:

- In relation to water ingress or leaks, ensuring that these repairs were managed effectively was crucial, as inadequate drying could lead to D&M issues later on. Addressing these concerns promptly would help the avoidance of complications down the line;
- Each concern was dealt with on its merits on a case by case basis and would involve Housing teams when appropriate. Officers would work closely with tenants, building relationships with them to consider options including decanting the tenant if needed;
- Complex cases would be dealt with by way of a case conference to consider the most appropriate way forward;
- On-site surveyors were reporting cases immediately following the roll-out of technology. The 20 day target to rectify the issue would then commence;

The Chair thanked the Officers for their presentation and advised that she was pleased to see the improvements to the Service.

It was **RESOLVED** that the presentation be noted.

4 **HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT**

The Committee received a presentation from the Head of Housing Asset Management outlining the key areas covered by the Service.

The Committee was informed that the team had developed all programmes of works using stock intelligence gathered in consultation with residents and housing management as this was key to understanding the condition of the stock.

In relation to Decent Homes, it was agreed that continued investment in the stock was key to meeting and maintaining compliance with the standard. Further consultation would be undertaken on Decent Homes 2 and a detailed communications strategy would be drawn up to ensure transparency for tenants on where their property was within the programme.

Officers reported on the current position in respect of decarbonisation and energy efficiency with 2684 properties still requiring work to meet the minimum Band C target. Over £5million funding had been secured with SBC match funding and a Warm Homes bid for 550 homes would be submitted. It was noted that to achieve net zero by 2050, £169million investment would be required.

An update was given on the current capital programme including

- Major Refurbishment Contract (MRC),
- Decent Homes,
- SHDF Wave 2 – Delivery of Energy Efficiency Measures to flat blocks and Street Properties;
- High Rise – Replacement Fire Doors (Flats and Communal);
- Fencing Programme – Planned programme of over £1million this year.

It was noted that in relation to High Rise Refurbishment Works, consultation was due to start in December and would include roofing, windows, heating, communal area decoration and re-modelling. Overall, the Investment in the existing stock over the next 5 years totalled £110 million.

In response to a question regarding the fencing programme, Officers advised that the fencing policy had been reviewed and was now more robust to avoid the constant fence replacements.

Improvements relating to the voids service were reported including the procurement of support contractors as the service moved to a hybrid delivery model. It was recognised that although there had been improvements there was still work to do within the service.

Members were advised that the Aids and Adaptations Policy was in the process of being reworked and would ensure the Council was making the best use of the properties available and consider where the aids and adaptations were most appropriate and that reasonable adjustments could be made to ensure compliance with the Equality Act.

The chair asked for clarification that there was not any change to fix term tenancies. Officers confirmed that there were currently no plans to change the existing policy. Tenants who were offered the opportunity to move to sheltered accommodation were at liberty to accept or decline the offer.

Following further consideration, it was agreed that Aids and Adaptations be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee for more targeted scrutiny.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their presentation.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the presentation be noted;
2. That a further review of the Aids and Adaptation works be brought back to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

5 **HOUSING ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY**

The Committee received a presentation informing Members on how ASB and Hate Crime was managed within the Housing Management Department. Key areas of the draft Tenants and Leaseholders ASB policy were highlighted and the roles and resources available to assist with this process were identified alongside details of the main legislation that was used when enforcement procedures were necessary.

Officers recognised that anti-social behaviour was a priority issue for local people and that such behaviour could have a severe effect on the well-being of residents. It was noted that the Council had a duty to take action to minimise it through preventative measures, enforcement actions, and support for victims, witnesses, and staff. Support would be put in place for victims and perpetrators to try and resolve the ASB with an understanding that not everyone was aware their behaviour was impacting others.

The revised Draft Policy set out the Council's approach to ASB including how the Council would work with victims, witnesses, partners and the Police.

It was noted that as part of their Tenancy Agreement each tenant is issued with a set of tenancy conditions by which they must abide. Leaseholders were issued with a lease agreement.

Definitions of the different levels of ASB and Hate Crime were outlined for the Committee as well as enforcement, tools and powers the team and wider agencies could use.

In response to a question regarding the expectations of complainants, Members were advised that these had to be managed from an early stage as most cases took a substantial amount of time to reach a conclusion. Support would be available for all involved from the start of a case.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their presentation and for the work the Team did in this very difficult area.

It was **RESOLVED** that the presentation be noted.

6 **URGENT PART 1 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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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday, 8 January 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren (Vice Chair),
Leanne Brady, Akin Elekolusi, Alistair Gordon, Lynda Guy
and Jade Woods

Start / End Start Time: 6.05pm
Time: End Time: 8.10pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Committee Members, Councillors Stephen Booth and Mason Humberstone.

Apologies were also received from Councillor Conor McGrath who had been invited to attend the meeting in their capacity as Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities which included Equalities and Diversity.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 28 NOVEMBER 2024

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Community Select Committee held on 28 November 2024 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 EQUALITIES, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION PRESENTATION

The Committee received a presentation from the Council's Corporate Policy and Research Officer, who provided an overview of the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) activities. They explained that the work was underpinned by the Equality Act, which protected individuals from discrimination and identified nine protected characteristics. The Committee heard that the Council also considered socio-economic status in its EDI work to better understand and serve the local community.

The Corporate Policy and Research Officer highlighted the Council's EDI Action Plan, implemented in 2023 and reviewed annually, which included 18 actions across six key objectives. Quarterly updates and an annual progress report ensured ongoing monitoring and improvement. Key actions included initiatives such as the Healthy Stevenage Partnership, the publication of the Equality and Diversity Annual Report, and the introduction of a Race Equality Bill encompassing ethnicity

reporting. Other notable activities included community safety programmes, partnerships aimed at improving youth opportunities, and internal staff networks.

The Corporate Policy and Research Officer outlined the Council's annual Equality and Diversity Report. Recent data revealed that Stevenage had a population of 90,000, with diverse demographics, including the third-largest LGBTQ population in Hertfordshire, and a higher proportion of residents with disabilities compared to the national average.

The Committee were informed that Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) were conducted for all new policies and strategies to ensure their impact on protected characteristic groups was considered. Examples included policies related to cemetery accessibility, gender reassignment name changes, and safeguarding strategies. The Corporate Policy and Research Officer confirmed that EQIAs were included with relevant policy documents submitted to Cabinet.

The presentation also covered the Council's two EDI working groups: the Officer Equality Group, which oversaw action plan progress, and the Equality Diversity Governance Group, which included councillors and ensured member awareness of EDI initiatives. Additionally, the Council supported staff networks for LGBTQ and women's groups, with plans to expand to a neurodiversity network.

The Corporate Policy and Research Officer concluded with an update on the EDI Event Calendar, an internal resource for tracking equality-related events, which was being revised for potential external use.

Throughout the presentation, Members asked a number of questions.

Responding to questions regarding the data, Officers explained that the data was predominantly sourced from the census but also included internal data, workforce information, and other published national and local data. They noted that Herts Insight was a key source for additional data. Officers clarified that the data was primarily presented for Stevenage as a whole. However, ward specific queries could be addressed if needed.

Responding to a question related to the accessibility of Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA's), Officers stated that while not all EQIAs were readily available, examples were provided on the Council's website. They also noted that every policy or strategy submitted to Cabinet includes an attached EQIA, making them publicly accessible once published.

In response to questions regarding the Equality and Diversity Governance Group, Officers explained that not all protected characteristic groups were directly represented by individuals on the Equality and Diversity Governance Group (EDGG). However, the Officer Equality Group (OEG) was established to ensure broader representation across these groups, providing a platform for staff to voice their perspectives. Officers advised that membership of the OEG was advertised internally on the Council's intranet, and staff could put themselves forward to join. They highlighted that membership of the group has grown significantly over the past year and that there was no upper limit on participation.

The Committee received a further presentation from the Council's Officer Lead on the Stevenage Equalities Commission, and Errol John, Chair of the Stevenage Equalities Commission.

The Committee heard that the Commission was formed following a Council motion in July 2020 to address race inequality and represent ethnically diverse communities. The Commission was established in Spring 2021, following delays caused by COVID-19. It was led by independent Chair Errol John, who was nominated by community groups and elected members.

Initially supported by Stevenage Borough Council, the Committee heard that the COMMISSION became self-funded from April 2022. It consisted of 20 members: 10 from strategic organisations (e.g., police, education, health, and elected members) and 10 from the community, ensuring equal representation.

The Committee were informed the Commission had held discovery meetings and consultations, exploring lived experiences and issues such as health inequalities, stop and search practices, and educational challenges. Recommendations were developed to inform the Council's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) strategy and action plan. The Commission transitioned into the Stevenage Equalities Commission Legacy Group to ensure its ongoing impact.

The Committee were informed that the Commission hosted a successful conference in October 2024 during Hate Crime Awareness Week and Black History Month and had secured funding for initiatives such as a civic leadership programme (in collaboration with Operation Black Vote) and a website offering resources for volunteers and community members.

The Committee heard that the Commission had produced materials to promote engagement with ethnically diverse communities and would continue to raise awareness through events and a forthcoming website. Resources from previous events, such as the conference and recommendations, were available and could be shared for further review.

The presentation concluded by informing Members of plans to formalise a multi-stakeholder cooperative by March 2025 to advocate for ethnically diverse communities and ensure sustainability.

The Chair requested more detail on the lived experiences gathered by the Commission. In response, the Chair of the Commission advised Members that lived experiences were gathered through community consultations and contributions from professionals. Examples included a sickle cell anaemia patient's account of health inequality challenges and a magistrate's story of overcoming barriers and inspiring others in the community.

The Committee were informed that, prior to the Commission's formation, insights were collected during the Stevenage Legacy and Resilience Project, attended by 300 people, highlighting issues around health and mental health inequalities during COVID-19.

Responding to a question related to the Commissions work directing policy changes, the Council's Commission Officer Lead advised that, while no direct policy changes were implemented, the Commission's recommendations informed the EDI strategy and an action plan. A notable initiative that arose from the recommendations was the development of a civic responsibility programme in collaboration with Operation Black Vote.

In a response to a questions regarding consideration given to children in care, especially from ethnically diverse backgrounds, within the Commissions work, the Committee heard that the Commission explored educational access, exclusions, and the broader challenges faced by economically deprived and vulnerable children. Specific focus was given to black and minority ethnic children in care, with input from Children's Social Care and strategic groups across the county. The Committee were advised that the EDI strategy addressed issues affecting vulnerable children, including those in care, through initiatives such as Mission 44. However, a distinct focus group solely for children in care had not been established.

The Chair invited Kate Belinis, Chair of Stevenage World Forum, to address the Committee.

The Chair of the Forum elaborated on the priorities for the Commission with a key focus on ensuring that the recommendations from the Commission's report on race equality were actively implemented rather than overlooked. The establishment of a legacy group was cited as a crucial step to maintain progress, foster independence from the Council, and sustain momentum.

Addressing the challenges faced by the Commission, the Chair (Stevenage World Forum) highlighted the ongoing economic difficulties, post-COVID recovery, and the associated losses that communities had endured, which complicated the Commission's work. The Committee heard that long-serving members were looking towards succession planning to bring in fresh leadership and ideas.

The Committee were advised that a consistent theme across the Commissions priorities was fostering greater community engagement. The Chair (Stevenage World Forum) emphasised the need to involve a more diverse range of people in leadership roles, such as school governors, magistrates, and other public offices, through initiatives like the citizenship programme with Operation Black Votes. The group had also been working on ways to connect with new residents and encourage broader participation.

Efforts to increase both individual and community capacity were discussed, including:

- Hosting conferences and events that attracted significant participation.
- Creating accessible resources for the community, such as spaces to meet and tools for engagement.
- Reviving initiatives like the "Celebrate" programme, which historically brought people together for community-building activities.

The Committee were informed that the Commission sought to secure funding to sustain its activities and support the infrastructure of the voluntary and community sector. This included providing small-scale support, such as offering spaces for meetings or access to office resources, and maintaining engagement with partner agencies.

Members emphasised the importance of coaching and confidence-building for individuals, particularly for those engaging in public speaking and leadership roles.

Reflecting on the past, there was discussion about how societal changes had impacted the ease of forming connections. Members expressed a desire to rebuild the kind of networks that were more prevalent in earlier times.

Members advocated for visible recognition of past contributors, like Sherma Batson, to inspire future generations and ensure the legacy of their efforts.

The Chair (Stevenage World Forum) concluded with a call for increased collaboration with councillors and the wider community to strengthen and sustain the Commission's initiatives.

The Chair then asked Cllr Elekolusi, described as a successful community leader, to share his experiences and perspectives on fostering community engagement in Stevenage.

Having lived in Stevenage for 25 years and previously owned a business in the town, Cllr Elekolusi noted his strong connections with community groups. The Committee heard they had consistently worked to encourage greater engagement, emphasising the importance of bridging gaps between the council and diverse communities.

Cllr Elekolusi advised that many residents, particularly from ethnic minority backgrounds, remained unaware of the council's role, its services, or even which councillors represented them. This lack of knowledge led to confusion, as evidenced by the direct calls and queries Cllr Elekolusi received from residents, even from those outside his ward.

Cllr Elekolusi suggested organising seminars, conferences, or similar events to connect with key community groups. These initiatives could help raise awareness about the council's role, build relationships, and foster trust. He highlighted the importance of ongoing efforts to bridge the "institutional ignorance" and "communal ignorance" that hindered effective engagement.

Cllr Elekolusi expressed his willingness to support the council in addressing these challenges. He affirmed that the community was eager to participate and welcomed steps to increase collaboration.

Following Cllr Elekolusi's remarks, the Chair emphasised several practical steps and reflections:

The Chair proposed creating visible touchpoints in public areas, such as the council

foyer, featuring recognisable symbols or emblems to help residents identify and engage with council services.

There was a discussion about addressing barriers to access, such as:

- Introducing priority lanes for individuals with disabilities.
- Ensuring the availability of translated documents for non-English speakers.
- Considering ways to address literacy issues, which, while not a protected characteristic, presented significant barriers to communication and engagement.

The Chair highlighted the critical importance of effective communication. Once residents were informed about services and opportunities, they were more likely to engage.

The Chair then invited John Prebble, Director (Junction 7) and Coco Rose to address the Committee.

The Co-Director (Junction 7) began by showcasing merchandise from Stevenage Pride, including badges, T-shirts, and flags. They commended Coco for championing Stevenage Pride and playing a key role in organising the Pride Area at Stevenage Day. This effort, described as a collaborative and impactful initiative, received widespread appreciation from the LGBTQ+ community and beyond.

Coco expressed gratitude for the overwhelming support shown during Stevenage Day, which affirmed the importance of providing dedicated spaces for the LGBTQ+ community. They emphasised the need to continue and build upon this momentum to ensure that the visibility and inclusivity of such events are sustained.

The speakers highlighted a unique initiative at the Pride Area—a blank canvas inviting attendees to share what they were proud of. A selection of responses was read aloud, showcasing a wide spectrum of personal stories, such as:

- Pride in being one's authentic self.
- Pride in gender transition and self-discovery.
- Celebrating diversity, from being queer to breaking personal barriers.

Those heartfelt messages illustrated the diversity within the LGBTQ+ community and underscored the importance of creating safe, welcoming spaces for self-expression and representation.

Coco shared feedback from various LGBTQ+ groups that had avoided Stevenage Day in the past due to its lack of representation and perceived negative connotations. They felt excluded and unwelcome, with little visibility for their community. However, the Pride Area at Stevenage Day changed this narrative, providing a platform for inclusivity and breaking down long-standing barriers.

Both speakers acknowledged the crucial role of Stevenage Borough Council in supporting the initiative. They emphasised the need to ensure the progress made at Stevenage Day continued, with more representation and visibility for the LGBTQ+

community at future events.

Speakers reflected on the importance of sustaining the "flame" of inclusivity and pride. The Co-Director (Junction 7) reinforced the idea that Stevenage Day's Pride Area was not only a celebration but also a transformative space for the community. The event marked a turning point in fostering acceptance, representation, and unity.

The Committee heard that the Pride Bench project in Shephall was initiated by local trans woman and supported by Ward Councillors. The project involved transforming a standard bench into the Pride Progress flag as a symbol of inclusivity and representation.

The Co-Director (Junction 7) advised Members that the initiative received strong support and encountered no barriers during implementation, reflecting the community's willingness to embrace inclusivity. Despite concerns about potential vandalism or graffiti, the bench had remained intact, receiving positive public engagement, and sparking meaningful conversations. Students and young people had embraced the bench as a safe and celebratory space, further reinforcing its value as a public symbol.

The Committee heard that young trans people in the community faced significant challenges, including societal hostility, misinformation, and lack of legal recognition for non-binary identities. Specific concerns were highlighted regarding barriers to changing legal documents, such as birth certificates, to align with chosen identities. Recent government decisions had resisted simplifying these processes, exacerbating difficulties for trans individuals.

The Co-Director (Junction 7) expressed a sense of societal regression in trans rights compared to broader LGBTQ+ progress, urging increased awareness and proactive measures to address these issues.

Education was identified as a crucial tool for combating ignorance and fostering understanding within the community. Personal reflections from the speakers emphasised how direct engagement with LGBTQ+ initiatives, such as the Pride bench project, helped broaden perspectives and dispel misconceptions. Social media was noted as a source of negativity and hostility, underscoring the importance of local initiatives to counter such influences.

The Committee heard that a recent Equality Impact Assessment addressed the protected characteristic of gender reassignment. Measures included allowing individuals to update pre-purchased grave records to reflect their true identity, demonstrating progress in ensuring inclusivity in council services.

The Chair encouraged Members to replicate the Pride bench initiative in other wards, creating a network of symbolic spaces for visibility and dialogue.

Junction 7's contributions to the community were acknowledged, particularly in providing a safe space for creativity and self-expression. The organisation's role in fostering inclusivity and representation was seen as vital. The broader impact of public art and symbols, such as the Pride bench, in promoting acceptance and

dialogue was emphasised. Such initiatives played a key role in normalising conversations around diversity and reducing ignorance.

The discussion concluded with an emphasis on the need for continued vigilance and proactive measures to address the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community, particularly trans individuals.

Participants expressed gratitude for the support and contributions of all involved in promoting inclusivity within the community.

A Member expressed appreciation for Pride events nationwide and highlighted their positive atmosphere. They queried the barriers preventing a full-scale Pride event in Stevenage, comparing it to successful events in other towns and cities. In response, the Committee heard that progress had been made with initiatives such as the Pride area at Stevenage Day, which was a success and well-received by the community. The Committee were informed that the focus was now on building upon those efforts and encouraging broader community and council engagement to expand future Pride celebrations.

Members highlighted the importance of trans representation in discussions and events, emphasising the value of hearing lived experiences to address misconceptions and combat hatred. Social media's dual role as an educational tool and a platform prone to negative discourse was discussed.

The Co-Director (Junction 7) expressed concerns about the sustainability of grassroots initiatives, particularly the reliance on a few dedicated individuals. The importance of ensuring longevity and support for projects like Pride and other community-led events was emphasised.

The Chair acknowledged the absence of disabled representation and committed to ensuring future discussions included a diverse range of voices.

The item concluded with a reaffirmation of the importance of continued collaboration between the Council, local organisations, and community members. Attendees were thanked for their contributions.

4 **EQUALITIES, DIVERSITY & SOCIAL INCLUSION - SCRUTINY REVIEW SCOPING DOCUMENT**

The Chair opened a discussion regarding the Equality, Diversity & Social Inclusion – Scrutiny Review Scoping Document.

Areas highlighted for further discussion were:

- Community Cohesion and Engagement
- Representation and Inclusivity
- Accessibility & Disability Considerations
- Policy Impact

Discussing a future meeting focussed on addressing community cohesion in Stevenage, and public concerns related to refugees housed in hotels. Councillors

discussed the misinformation, perceptions, and tensions within the community, as well as the Council's responsibility to address these issues constructively while clarifying its role and limitations.

The discussion touched on broader concerns, including public safety, community engagement, and ensuring transparency in addressing sensitive topics.

Members expressed the need to strike a balance between advocating for the community, managing perceptions, and providing accurate information to prevent the escalation of community tensions.

The discussion highlighted challenges in scheduling meetings to address community concerns, especially given the sensitive nature of the topics and the broader scope of the council's ongoing work.

Members commented on the need to consider:

- Misinformation and Community Tensions
- Public Safety and Perception
- The Council's Role and Limitations
- Community Engagement and Advocacy

The Committee held a discussion regarding the best approach to ensure effective scrutiny of a contentious and sensitive topic.

Members expressed the importance of balancing open and transparent engagement with the need to manage sensitive discussions constructively.

Members expressed a range of perspectives regarding the best way forward and it was agreed that the Committee would hold a dedicated meeting to focus on community cohesion with Members bringing structured questions to address public concerns and continue clarification of the Council's role and responsibilities in this matter.

These actions aimed to foster greater understanding, mitigate misinformation, and ensure that all voices were heard in a respectful and productive manner.

5 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

6 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Not required.

7 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday, 12 December 2024

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Autun Room - Autun Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Rob Broom (Chair)(Chair), Andy McGuinness (Vice-Chair),
Forhad Chowdhury, Alistair Gordon, Ellie Plater CC, Nigel
Williams and Jade Woods

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm

Time: End Time: 7.30pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair opened the meeting with a minute silence and reflection in memory of Councillor Graham Snell. The Chair added that Councillor Snell had served on the Environment and Economy Select Committee for a number of years and had been a good natured and valued contributor to the Committee.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Julie Ashley-Wren, Leanne Brady, Sarah Mead and Claire Parris.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 12 NOVEMBER 2024

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Environment and Economy Select Committee meeting held on 12 November 2024 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 SKILLS REVIEW - INPUT FROM STEP 2 SKILLS HCC ADULT LEARNING & TRAINING SERVICE

At this juncture the Chair introduced Matt Partridge, Chief Executive (Stevenage Borough Council) and Advisory Board Member (Step2Skills), Daryl Jedowski, Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, and Carol Richardson, Enterprise and Skills Partnership Officer.

The Chair opened the meeting by providing an overview of recent developments at the national level relevant to the committee's ongoing work on the local skills agenda. A recent Government White Paper, Getting Britain Working, outlined proposed reforms aimed at aligning employment and career support services more effectively. Key challenges identified included limited collaboration between Jobcentre Plus and employers, insufficient outcomes from the National Careers Service, and overly centralised and compliance-focused employment support.

Proposed national service developments included:

- Greater integration of employment support with skills and careers advice.
- Stronger partnerships with local employers and embedding the principle of localism.
- Enhanced digital offerings to improve accessibility.
- A personalised approach to employment support, with reduced reliance on sanction targets.

The Chair highlighted ongoing pilot schemes in locations such as Wolseley and East Kilbride, as well as the importance of Skills England working collaboratively with local authorities, businesses, and education providers. This aligned with Stevenage's proactive work on its local skills agenda, which positioned the town well to meet future employment needs.

The Chair asked the Chief Executive a question regarding their involvement with the Step2Skills programme.

The Chief Executive explained that they had been a member of the Step2Skills advisory board for approximately five years, having joined after volunteering at a Hertfordshire Chief Executives meeting to fill a vacancy. They highlighted the importance of the programme to Hertfordshire and Stevenage residents, emphasising the board's diverse representation, which included members from local Further Education colleges, Hertfordshire County Council Children's Services, the district council, the voluntary and adult education sectors, and programme delivery partners.

The Committee heard that the board's role was to provide strategic direction and oversight, acting as a "critical friend" to the Step2Skills senior team, led by their Head of Service. Although the board did not have decision-making authority over budgets or operational actions, it reviewed strategies and policies, offering feedback that was frequently incorporated into adjustments.

The Chief Executive praised the Step2Skills team for their exceptional commitment and vocational passion for their work and highlighted their efforts in Stevenage, including career fairs and other initiatives, which aligned with the town's priorities.

The Chair asked the Chief Executive about Step2Skills' efforts to support individuals in bridging the gap into employment.

In response, the Chief Executive outlined several local challenges faced by Stevenage residents, including:

- Median annual earnings in Stevenage being lower than Hertfordshire and national averages.
- Lower pupil attainment levels across educational stages compared to Hertfordshire and England averages.
- A lack of technical and niche skills required for certain roles, compounded by recruitment challenges in specific sectors such as aerospace and STEM.

- Gaps in soft skills such as communication and administrative capabilities.
- Barriers such as high living costs, limited transport accessibility, and inflexible working hours, particularly affecting roles like adult social care.

The Chief Executive highlighted the competitive local job market, noting that while Stevenage was positioned well due to its diverse sectors, recruitment challenges persisted. They gave the example of Glaxo Smith Kline's £1 billion investment in the area which was expected to generate 4,000 jobs over the next decade. The Chief Executive commented on the importance of equipping local residents with the skills and qualifications needed to secure those opportunities.

The Committee heard that Step2Skills played a significant role in addressing those issues, focusing its efforts on areas with higher deprivation and lower educational attainment, such as Stevenage, Broxbourne, and Watford. The Chief Executive advised Members that the programme's impact was limited by its reliance on external funding, which required ongoing bidding for government grants, such as the Multiply project.

The Chief Executive informed the Committee that while Step2Skills could not address all challenges alone, it collaborated with other organisations like the Hertfordshire Opportunities Portal and Mission 44 to prepare residents for meaningful employment.

The Chair asked the Chief Executive for more information about the Multiply Project, noting its practical approach.

The Chief Executive explained that the project focused on improving adult numeracy skills across the UK. Funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, it specifically supported adults who lacked a GCSE grade C (or grade 4) in mathematics, helping them to enhance their numeracy skills.

Locally, the Multiply programme had been operating at the Bedwell Community Centre, providing accessible opportunities for Bedwell residents to improve their skills and boost their employability.

The Chair reflected on the challenges within the local economy, particularly the disconnect between job vacancies and local employability. While efforts focused on high-level technical roles in life sciences and engineering, there remained a need to address gaps in other sectors. The Chair expressed hope that national policies, such as the Government's proposed reforms, alongside local initiatives, would help shift the situation in the coming years.

The Chief Executive highlighted the role of the Senior Skills Framework, which was approved earlier in the year. That framework prioritised sectors like life sciences and engineering as part of Stevenage's broader skills strategy. The Committee heard of ongoing efforts to expand successful local models, such as the Stevenage Works initiative, into wider sectors.

The Chief Executive commented on collaboration with organisations like JobCentre Plus, further education colleges, and the Stevenage Works Board to strengthen local

partnerships and improve pathways into employment. Those measures aimed to tackle skills shortages, fill local vacancies, and better align the labour market with employer needs.

Members asked questions related to funding. In response, the Chief Executive advised that while the programme was supported by some core funding from Hertfordshire County Council, a large portion of its budget came from external sources such as the Multiply programme and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Despite the reliance on external pots, the programme's significant role in adult skills development made it a crucial service.

A Member noted that while the government's white paper on skills development was promising, it fell short without proper funding to back it up. Members emphasised that without investment in training resources, staff, and supportive environments, the programme's potential would be limited.

The Committee heard of structural changes within Hertfordshire Futures, as Step2Skills recently moved from the Adult Social Care division to Hertfordshire Futures. This shift was seen as a positive move for improving alignment with broader county-wide economic growth initiatives. However, the Chief Executive commented about the risk of Step2Skills losing its unique identity and purpose within the broader structure of Hertfordshire Futures, stressing the importance of maintaining its focus on adult skills and re-skilling.

The Chief Executive highlighted the use of different platforms such as the Hertfordshire Opportunities Portal and local colleges, which could make it difficult for residents to navigate. They suggested that the Council could take on a role as a "navigator" to help residents understand and access the right resources for training and employment. The Chair also highlighted the need for timely and accurate careers information, not just for young people, but also for adults who may be looking to re-skill or shift careers.

Members commented on the impact on funding should Hertfordshire adopt a unitary authority model. The Chief Executive noted that the government was pushing for the mayoral model by offering financial incentives and powers, which could be hard for local authorities to resist. However, they acknowledged that the upcoming devolution white paper would likely offer further clarity on this topic.

Responding to a question regarding the potential for Stevenage Works to expand into additional employment sectors such as social care, health and green skills, the Chief Executive advised the Committee that green skills were already part of the town's skills framework, though the capacity to fully develop this area was still growing. It was noted that the success of the construction sector within Stevenage Works could serve as a model for other industries, but significant resources would be required to scale it up.

The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager added that that STEM education should be linked to green skills, as the government promoted a clean energy future. Stevenage's geographical location was seen as an advantage for connecting to these growing sectors, particularly in life sciences, space, defence, and advanced

manufacturing.

The Chair asked the Chief Executive a questions regarding increasing local aspirations, particularly among young people, by broadening their horizons and helping them believe in their potential.

The Chief Executive shared an example from Autolyst, a local life sciences company, which worked to engage young people in career opportunities. Several success stories were shared, including one of a young woman who, despite struggling at school, now had a successful apprenticeship with a life sciences business. This success story exemplifids the importance of raising self-belief among young people and showcasing diverse career opportunities.

The Chief Executive highlighted the importance of connecting the various players in the skills landscape—such as local government, universities, colleges, and programmes like Step2Skills—to ensure that individuals knew where to turn for support and opportunities. While there were many good examples of successful interventions, they acknowledged the need to better communicate and celebrate these achievements to inspire others.

Members commented that, while much of the discussion had centred on young people, there is also a need to focus on adults looking for a career change or those seeking a second or third chance. This includes people who may be in their 30s and 40s, potentially with limited opportunities or direction in their career.

The Chief Executive responded by highlighting that programmes such as Step to Skills were working to support people of all ages, including those seeking to re-enter the workforce or change their career path. They mentioned an inspiring example of Ukrainian refugees in St Albans, whose energy and commitment to learning English and securing jobs in the UK demonstrated the drive of people at various stages of life. The Chief Executive underlined that skills development was not just about younger generations, but about providing support for people at different points in their lives.

Members asked questions regarding how the Council could support both disabled individuals and employers, ensuring that there were fewer barriers for disabled people seeking employment.

The Chief Executive responded by highlighting the role of Hertfordshire Futures, which worked with employers who had inclusive, disability-friendly policies. They acknowledged the broader value of diversity in the workforce, emphasising the importance of disability inclusion, particularly in local government services, which could have a positive impact on both employees and service users.

Responding to a question regarding a shared services model, the Chief Executive noted that while other areas in Hertfordshire may be more affluent, Stevenage had specific challenges that required tailored local responses. The Committee heard that the local approach in Stevenage was about addressing those unique needs, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all model. This was key to shaping policies that worked for Stevenage's specific demographic, which differed from other areas.

The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager added that the development of a strong local agenda and the ability to influence county-level decisions meant that Stevenage could now have a more significant voice in shaping policies that affected its community, especially as national policy evolved.

4 **DRAFT REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SKILLS REVIEW**

The Committee reviewed the initial draft of the Skills Review Report and its recommendations.

Members emphasised the importance of addressing neurodiversity within training recommendations, suggesting a more holistic and personalised approach to training, ensuring a mix of hands-on and classroom-based options to cater to diverse learning styles. Peer-to-peer mentoring and improved outreach to individuals between contracts or not actively engaging with traditional job-seeking avenues were also discussed.

Members commented about the feasibility of lobbying for extended funding for weekend childcare, given staffing and operational challenges faced by providers. Alternative suggestions included promoting workplace childcare facilities through partnerships with local employers and rethinking youth service provision to alleviate reliance on early years settings.

Members advocated for raising awareness of the value of early years education as a career choice, addressing perceptions of it as a secondary career option, and linking this with the expansion of qualifications like T Levels.

Members encouraged a focus on recommendations within the council's direct influence, such as expanding Stevenage Works and improving collaboration among local education providers. Concerns were expressed about recommendations overly reliant on national policy changes, such as funding models for post-16 education.

Members highlighted the need for independent, objective careers advice, along with suggestions for a local careers centre to provide guidance free from educational institution bias. Members also discussed the council's role in providing quality work experience placements and modelling best practice in skills development.

The Chair and members expressed appreciation for the contributions and feedback, noting the importance of refining recommendations to focus on achievable, impactful actions.

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 14 January 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Rob Broom (Chair), Leanne Brady, Forhad Chowdhury, Alistair Gordon, Sarah Mead, Claire Parris, Ellie Plater CC, Nigel Williams, Jade Woods and Julie Ashley-Wren

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm

Time: End Time: 7.23pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Andy McGuinness.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 12 DECEMBER 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Environment and Economy Select Committee be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **FINAL REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SKILLS AGENDA REVIEW**

The Chair introduced the report, thanking Members and Officers, particularly the Council's Scrutiny Officer, for their contributions to the review. The Chair highlighted the importance of the recommendations, reflecting the Committee's commitment to improving skills and opportunities in Stevenage and Hertfordshire.

Recommendation 1 – Expansion of Stevenage Works

Members supported this recommendation, with particular interest in creating green apprenticeships.

The Chair emphasised the council's active involvement in delivering on-the-ground initiatives such as apprenticeships. The ambition was to see even small-scale success, such as a handful of green apprenticeships annually.

There was broad agreement among members on the importance of continuing this work.

Recommendation 2 – Upskilling

The Chair acknowledged this as an area where further action was needed, expressing a desire for broader recommendations.

Members highlighted the significant potential to upskill individuals aged late 20s to

early 40s, noting that many in this demographic still had decades left in the workforce.

Members stressed the importance of understanding barriers such as disabilities and non-academic backgrounds to better support this group.

Members proposed scoping further work in the future to explore the specific skills and training needs of this demographic.

Recommendation 3 – Promotion of the T-Level qualification for nursery childcare into the local economy

Members commented about T-Levels being used as unpaid labour during the two-year training period, potentially leading to a lack of job opportunities post-qualification. The industry may exploit this for cost-saving purposes, creating a mismatch between the number of trainees and actual jobs available.

Members suggested focusing on apprenticeships instead, as they offered paid opportunities and may be more appealing to young people. An example of personal experience of unpaid training being a negative experience was shared.

The Chair agreed on the importance of promoting qualifications for childcare but highlighted that much of this fell under the remit of Hertfordshire County Council.

Recommendation 4 – Challenge to HCC & Local Children Centres regarding providing clear accessible information on what funding is available for families for childcare.

Discussions included the importance of clear, accessible information on childcare funding and support to help parents navigate work-life balance and employment opportunities.

The Chair highlighted that much of this fell under the remit of Hertfordshire County Council but promoted the need for clear signposting from the Council to assist parents.

Recommendation 5 – Promotion of work experience opportunities

Members commented on the importance of managing students' expectations about work placements, particularly in sectors like childcare and education, to avoid setting them up for failure. It was noted that work experience placements are most valuable when students receive an accurate overview of the job role.

Recommendation 6 – Promotion of success stories from Stevenage

The Chair suggested creating a Mayor's Award for Learning to celebrate successes by college and school students where they attained excellent skills, outcomes and, as in turn, became the role models for successive years of students.

Members suggested celebrating a wide range of achievements, from academic progress to personal development, to avoid focusing only on high achievers. Proposed a focus on inclusive recognition, where progress in challenging circumstances is celebrated.

Members proposed linking the award with existing school achievement programmes and expanding it to include a borough-wide recognition event, potentially incorporating schools nominating their top achievers. Highlighted the potential for this initiative to strengthen community ties and foster aspiration.

Members suggested that the award's title could be "Mayor's Award for Progression" or "Achievement" rather than "Mayor's Award for Learning" to ensure it did not alienate non-academic students.

Members emphasised recognising low achievers who had made significant personal strides, commenting that their progress was equally valuable and often overlooked.

Recommendation 7 – Promotion of a clear local careers advice service

Members commented on a lack of comprehensive and objective careers advice services in schools due to inadequate funding and limited joined-up approaches.

Members commented that Youth Connection services had transitioned into targeted youth support, focussed on at-risk children rather than providing universal careers advice.

It was noted that companies offering work experience placements struggled with limited capacity, resource shortages, and administrative burdens such as paperwork and risk assessments.

Members suggested Officers, such as the Council's Enterprise and Skills Partnership Officer, be encouraged to collaborate with other agencies to address these challenges and improve the delivery of careers advice.

Members noted that awareness of the National Skills Service was low, acknowledging its potential but noting that many stakeholders were unaware of its existence.

Members proposed the creation of a centralised information hub on the council's website to provide accessible details about job opportunities, training, apprenticeships, and other resources. This platform would also allow businesses, schools, and colleges to contribute information.

Recommendation 8 – Commendation to North Herts College and Barnwell School for their work in promoting skills

Members praised North Hertfordshire College for its work on T-level qualifications and for creating effective learning environments to support young people.

Barnwell School was commended by Members for its mentoring programme, which was highlighted as a strong example of pupil-led support.

Members suggested the wording of commendations be revised to avoid singling out specific institutions, ensuring that the contributions to the development of skill, of all schools, were acknowledged.

Recommendation 9 – Devolved local skills strategy

The Chair advised that there was support for devolving skills strategy to local communities to better align with the specific needs of the local economy, particularly in emerging sectors such as life sciences.

Members emphasised that "one size fits all" solutions were ineffective, and localised strategies were better suited to address skill shortages.

At this juncture, the Committee held a discussion regarding insecure work.

Members commented on the prevalence of insecure contracts in industries such as construction and suggested that many workers in manual labour roles felt despondent, with limited guidance on career progression or alternative opportunities.

A lack of accessible information about qualifications, career paths, and transferable skills was highlighted as something that prevents workers from transitioning to more stable or fulfilling roles.

Members highlighted a need for targeted support to engage those in insecure roles, particularly manual labourers, by showcasing career paths and second-chance opportunities. This included highlighting potential transitions within industries (e.g., from bricklaying to business ownership) and promoting stories of success.

Members spoke of the need to address barriers such as limited access to training or fears around financial stability during career transitions.

Members suggested exploring the use of AI for job-matching tools to help individuals identify suitable roles based on their skills and aspirations although concerns were raised about potential biases within AI systems, which might disadvantage certain groups.

Members suggested encouraging students and workers to view vocational roles (e.g., construction) as viable long-term careers by illustrating progression opportunities within those sectors.

Members acknowledged that addressing insecure work could form part of a future scrutiny topic, given its complexity and relevance to the local economy. The importance of balancing innovative approaches (e.g., AI) with addressing systemic issues, such as cultural and economic biases, was noted.

During the discussion, Members proposed the following additional recommendation:

Proposed Recommendation: Collaboration with Employers to Promote Employment Opportunities

Members suggested that the Council engage with employers and recruiters in Stevenage, such as GSK, to ensure high-skilled job opportunities were widely advertised and accessible to local residents.

Members commented that many high-paid, high-skilled jobs were not visible to job seekers, as they were often gatekept by recruiters. They proposed working with companies and recruiters to address this. Members agreed that collaboration with

local businesses was essential to bridge this gap and increase awareness of available opportunities.

4 **ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee discussed the Work Programme.

During the discussion, the following topics were raised:

- **Waste and Recycling**

It was proposed that the Committee would hold two meetings on waste and recycling to explore the service in-depth, including statutory changes, climate implications, and service efficiency.

It was proposed that Members undertake site visits to the Cavendish Road Depot and "ride-alongs" with collection crews to gain firsthand insight into operations.

The Assistant Director (Stevenage Direct Services) explained that at the first meeting, officers would provide a broad overview of the service. Members could then use this overview to identify specific areas for more in-depth scrutiny at the second meeting.

- **Climate Change Progress Update**

It was proposed that the Committee would hold two meetings.

- March 2024
- November 2026.

- **Enforcement**

Members suggested the Committee allocate a meeting to parking enforcement, especially in areas with planned double yellow lining, to ensure the measures are effectively implemented and enforced.

Members commented about inadequate enforcement against fly-tipping, with calls for stronger responses and follow-ups to reduce incidents and costs.

- **Garages**

Some Members suggested a discussion on exploring the management of garages, a significant income source for the Council, including issues related to asbestos and service delivery. However, some Members questioned the necessity of this topic for scrutiny.

- **Street Scene**

Members suggested they examine hedge trimming, street cleaning, and overall maintenance of the public realm, with concerns over visibility issues and general upkeep.

- **Cycling and Active Travel**

Members discussed the need to revisit the 2019 cycling and pedestrian strategy in light of current needs and priorities. There were suggestions to

incorporate colour-coded signage on cycleways and walkways to encourage active travel and make navigation easier and more engaging.

- **Transport Accessibility**

Members suggested incorporating issues with car park availability, especially for disabled parking, and the negative impact on accessibility for individuals with mobility challenges.

Problems with the lift at Stevenage Station were discussed, which was reportedly out of order 30 times in 2024, impacting travellers reliant on it. Suggestions included escalating the matter to portfolio holders and following up on parliamentary discussions on the subject.

- **Town Centre Regeneration**

Members commented about the design and implementation of the regeneration project, including the integration of flats and shops, the loss of popular car parks, and the perceived inefficiency in the planning approach. Members suggested the need for an updated progress report on the regeneration project, avoiding repetitive information from earlier stages, and focussed on the current status and future plans.

- **Accessibility in the Public Realm**

Members proposed to address neurodiversity by creating autism-friendly spaces, better signposting, and quiet zones to support a less overwhelming shopping experience.

Members raised issues with covered walkways being repurposed by businesses, making them less accessible, and the general lack of cohesive design for accessibility in public areas.

Linking proposed items, Members suggested the Committee examine how regeneration efforts can improve accessibility in both the town centre and Old Town, ensuring inclusivity for all users.

The Chair suggested a holistic review of transportation, including cycling, pedestrian routes, and parking strategies, while addressing the impacts of reduced car parks and encouraging modal shifts to more sustainable options.

The Chair acknowledged the suggestions for future scrutiny topics and emphasised the need to ensure meaningful outcomes, with emphasis on issues affecting the public most directly.

5 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR

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**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 17 December 2024

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC, Myla Arceno, Stephen Booth, Rob Broom, Forhad Chowdhury, Peter Clark, Lynda Guy, Sarah Mead, Ceara Roopchand and Nigel Williams

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.27pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Robin Parker and Tom Plater.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 20 November 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the following inclusion:

Members requested that Cabinet report page numbers be included on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agendas.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE CABINET

The Committee considered the following Part I Decisions of the Cabinet taken on 11 December 2024:

3. Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny and Select Committees

The Committee noted the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny and Select Committees.

4. Corporate Performance – Quarter 2 2024/25

The Strategic Director (RP) advised the Committee that the Cabinet had received a presentation from the Chief Executive outlining corporate performance for Quarter 2. The update covered the performance suite and progress against the Council's corporate plan. Key areas of focus included improving tenant satisfaction, which will be supported by actions following the recent housing inspection.

The Cabinet discussed:

- Ensuring accessibility of parks, play areas, and open spaces for all groups, particularly adults with learning disabilities.
- Reviewing the framing of automated debt messaging to align with the Council's values.
- Positive feedback on the Ellis Avenue development, noting its alignment with the surrounding area.
- Acknowledgement of extensive resident consultation and engagement activity, which was well-received.

The Committee heard that the Cabinet approved all four recommendations outlined in the report.

A query was raised regarding resident feedback on developments. It was clarified that responses were typically mixed but informed design decisions, particularly around the Oval redevelopment, with a planning application anticipated for 2025/26.

At this juncture, the Chair noted difficulties with accessing visual elements of Cabinet presentations via YouTube. It was suggested that the presentation materials, already available on the Council's website, be made more accessible to address this issue.

The Committee noted the Corporate Performance – Quarter 2 2024/25.

5. Council Tax Base 2025/26

The Assistant Director (Finance) advised the Committee that the Cabinet considered a report on the council tax base for 2025/26, which was calculated at £28,571.8 Band D equivalent properties. This figure included an allowance for a 98% collection rate. The Cabinet approved the recommendations in the report and the council tax base would be included in the draft 2025/26 report, which was scheduled to be presented to Cabinet in January 2025.

The Committee noted the Council Tax Base 2025/26.

6. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Draft Budget and Rent Setting 2025/26

The Chief Financial Officer advised the Committee that the draft HRA budget for 2025/26 reflected pressures highlighted in the HRA Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) presented in November 2024.

The Committee heard that the average rent increase for 2025/26 was set at 2.7%, significantly lower than the 7.7% increase in 2024/25, due to a lower Consumer Price Index figure (1.7% in September 2024).

The Chief Financial Officer added that further budget pressures included potential increases in national insurance (pending confirmation from the finance settlement)

and rising costs related to responsive repairs and disrepair demands. These would be incorporated into the final budget, which would be presented to the January 2025 Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

A question was raised regarding improved rent collection rates. It was noted that rent collection had increased but remained a challenge, particularly as more tenants transitioned from housing benefit to Universal Credit.

Approximately 90% of tenants in arrears were on Universal Credit, presenting challenges as Universal Credit payments were made directly to tenants, unlike housing benefit, which was passported to the HRA.

The Chief Financial Officer informed the Committee that the Council was actively managing this issue through an income recovery plan, focusing on tenant support, repayment plans, and avoiding repossession proceedings where possible.

7. Housing Inspection Outcome

The Strategic Director (RP) advised the Committee that the Council underwent a housing inspection between July and October 2024, with the regulatory judgement issued on 27th November 2024. The Council received a C2 grading. The Cabinet was informed of the outcome and the need to meet with the regulator in January 2025 to agree on a Provider Improvement Plan (PIP).

Providing context for the grading, the Strategic Director (RP) advised that Stevenage was one of nine stock-owning authorities to receive a C2 rating, with the majority of other authorities graded at C3 or C4. Only one authority, Barnsley, achieved a C1 rating. They added that the Council was on track to achieve a higher grading in future, with improvement plans already in progress.

The Committee heard that a Provider Improvement Plan would address identified weaknesses, focusing on tenant engagement, property maintenance, and compliance. New strategies for tenant participation were approved in July 2024, with updated scrutiny and engagement frameworks now in place. Complaint-handling processes had been strengthened with fortnightly clinics to identify and address key drivers, such as roofing backlogs, and to monitor cases reviewed by the Housing Ombudsman or Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

The Committee were informed that rising labour and material costs, alongside increased demand for specialist works such as damp and mould remediation, were contributing to financial pressures within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The Cabinet had approved all five recommendations in the report.

8. Repairs and Maintenance Policy – Approval

The Assistant Director (Building Safety and Housing Property Services) informed the Committee that the report presented to Cabinet sought approval for the final version

of the Responsive Repairs and Maintenance Policy, following a consultation process involving tenants and leaseholders.

The Committee heard that a pre-consultation draft of the policy had been reviewed by Cabinet earlier in the year. The consultation received 343 responses, and feedback was incorporated as far as possible into the final version of the policy.

Changes to the policy, reflecting consultation feedback, were outlined in the report. Those amendments aimed to address the concerns and suggestions raised during the consultation process.

Cabinet approved the final policy, along with the recommendations set out in the report.

A Member commented on clarity of the consultation process, specifically whether it included feedback on the proposed responsibilities outlined in the policy or if it was limited to repair satisfaction surveys. In response, it was clarified that a broad consultation was conducted due to the absence of new tenant engagement mechanisms. This included sending out letters and quick guides to all tenants and leaseholders, holding in-person sessions (albeit with limited attendance), and conducting an online survey.

The consultation garnered 343 responses, with general agreement that responsibilities were clearly outlined. Some feedback included objections to charges for missed appointments and the clarification of specific responsibilities, such as drain blockages and infestations. Suggestions were made to ensure future reports transparently documented consultation outcomes, as tenants expected to see evidence of their participation.

Members raised queries about how the new policy, set to take effect on 1st January, would be communicated. Concerns included whether it would be made available in advance and whether the council would cater to tenants without digital access. It was confirmed that while the policy formalised existing practices, there were plans to publicise it via the council's website and a hard-copy newsletter. Efforts will be made to communicate notable changes, such as the new fencing policy, to tenants.

Members highlighted the need for a simplified version of the policy to increase accessibility for tenants, particularly those with complex needs, such as learning difficulties, illiteracy, or other vulnerabilities. Suggestions included creating a brief summary of responsibilities in a printed format and expanding the use of SMS notifications for appointment reminders, drawing on examples from NHS practices.

Members emphasised the importance of identifying and supporting vulnerable tenants, including those with physical disabilities, mental health issues, or financial difficulties. It was noted that while the Council held significant tenant data, there was room for improvement in using this information to tailor services and provide reasonable adjustments. Testimonies were shared, highlighting positive outcomes when housing officers were made aware of tenant vulnerabilities, underlining the need for tenants to feel encouraged to disclose their support requirements.

Members concluded the discussion reiterating the importance of effective tenant engagement and clear communication. The discussion underscored the need to balance cost considerations with accessibility and transparency while ensuring tenants are informed of their responsibilities and council services.

The Committee noted the decision of the Cabinet to approve the Repairs and Maintenance Policy.

9. Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy

The Strategic Director (RP) advised the Committee that the Council was required to produce a homelessness and rough sleeper strategy every five years. The new strategy covered the period 2025–2030 and included an associated action plan, which would be reviewed annually to ensure it remained current and effective. The strategy and action plan must be approved and published on the Council's website by the end of December 2024, as agreed with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

The Committee heard that consultation for the strategy included input from the Community Select Committee. Based on feedback, improvements to the accessibility and clarity of information on the Council's website were implemented. A new online tool now tailored advice based on users' needs, offering general guidance before direct engagement with services.

The Strategic Director (RP) informed the Committee that the Council engaged with rough sleepers through its dedicated Rough Sleeper Team, often in collaboration with other agencies such as the police, adult social care, and voluntary organisations. For rough sleepers from outside the area, the Council coordinated with their originating local authority to ensure they received appropriate support. Challenges included complex needs such as mental health issues, which could hinder engagement and uptake of housing offers.

The five recommendations were approved by Cabinet, including delegating authority to the Strategic Director (RP), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder (Housing), to make final amendments before publication.

Members commended the Rough Sleeper Team for their hard work and dedication in addressing homelessness and complex cases within Stevenage. Acknowledgement was made of the difficulty in resolving entrenched rough sleeping cases, particularly for individuals with mental health challenges.

The Committee noted the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part I Decisions of the Cabinet be noted.

4 **STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL - WEBSITE**

The Head of Customer and Digital Services provided an update on the Council's website, touching on its evolution over the last 30 years. Originally serving as a

basic directory, the website had grown into a significant resource, now containing over 11 million words and more than 1,000 pages. It served a wide range of purposes, including providing information, advice, and guidance about Council services, promoting key services and events, and ensuring transparency through governance and regulatory information.

A major point highlighted was the behaviour of website visitors. Most users accessed the site via Google, particularly searching for topics like bin collections, housing, council tax, and waste management. Housing-related content was the most frequently visited, followed by payment options and news events. Notably, two-thirds of visitors use mobile phones, primarily iPhones, and the website must be optimised for small screen devices, especially for short, transactional tasks like reporting missed bins.

The Head of Customer and Digital Services also addressed the ongoing efforts to simplify the website's content for better accessibility. The team aimed for a reading age of nine, though the average reading age on the site is currently 12.4 years. There was ongoing work to simplify and reclassify complex information, such as Council housing or planning services, making it easier for the public to navigate.

Accessibility remained a core focus, with particular attention to ensuring the site works for users with disabilities, including those who rely on screen readers. The team used various tools, such as Google and Microsoft analytics, to monitor user behaviour and identify areas for improvement, including search functionality and the presentation of events and services.

Looking ahead, The Head of Customer and Digital Services mentioned potential improvements in areas such as search functionality, where a more conversational query system (e.g., "I'm in council tax debt, what should I do?") could enhance user experience. The Council also aimed to update photos and videos, ensure relevant content was displayed, and improve the way events were presented to engage visitors more effectively.

In conclusion, the website was seen as a key tool for delivering services and information to the public, and the Council was focused on making it more user-friendly, accessible, and responsive to the needs of its visitors.

The Chair thanked the Head of Customer and Digital Services for their presentation and invited the Committee to ask questions.

A Member raised questions about the placement of the "Find Your Refuge," "Recycling Dates," and "Local Councillors" sections in the same area of the website. It was noted that this layout might confuse users into thinking the Councillors are involved in these services directly, leading them to contact Councillors for issues like missed bin collections. The Head of Customer and Digital Services responded, acknowledging the feedback and indicating that such changes could be considered to improve clarity and user navigation.

A Member commented about the user experience on different devices. They highlighted the 18-second average time visitors spend on a page and asked about

the frequency of testing pages on different devices, networks, and iOS/Android versions. The Head of Customer and Digital Services explained that while there was automated performance testing, it was limited, and some issues may be addressed on a case-by-case basis. He acknowledged the challenges with mobile payment functionality, noting that specific issues, like difficulties with council tax payments via mobile, could be linked to network providers. The Member confirmed that they had experienced issues with multiple networks but not on a laptop.

Another query focused on whether the website offered a dark mode feature, and if not, whether it could be considered for future updates to improve accessibility. The Head of Customer and Digital Services confirmed that dark mode was not currently available but agreed that it could be considered in future accessibility improvements.

A Member noted the significant difference between the usage of mobile devices for general browsing (87%) and the lower percentage (49%) for benefit claims. The Head of Customer and Digital Services suggested that benefit claims might be more complex, requiring users to sit down at a desk and fill out forms, which could explain the preference for other devices like laptops or desktops. He acknowledged that this insight could guide future improvements to make the claims process more suitable for mobile users, possibly by simplifying or adjusting the form for smaller devices.

A Member asked a question concerning the fault reporting system on the website, specifically whether users can track the progress of reported issues. The Head of Customer and Digital Services explained that it varied by service, but for services like environmental nuisance or park maintenance, users received a receipt with a reference number. Officers would then update the progress of the issue, and those updates were communicated back to the user. However, the effectiveness of this system depended on the Officers updating their own IT systems, and some delays might occur in the process.

A question was raised about improving the website's search function, which many users found ineffective, leading them to rely on Google instead. A suggestion was made to explore using Google's search functionality on the Council website for a small fee. The Head of Customer and Digital Services responded that this was technically possible and noted that some councils did use Google's search capabilities. However, he also mentioned the potential for more advanced AI-based technologies to offer more personalised and summarised answers, although caution was needed with the marketing of such technologies.

A Member suggested that the website had too many steps to complete a payment, which could be simplified. The Head of Customer and Digital Services acknowledged this issue, noting that saving card details could streamline the process, but the cost of this feature was currently high. He also agreed that some elements, like accessing balance information, could contribute to the complexity. A Member also raised an issue with the "rapid" page, which contained many forms that are not relevant to online payments, and the Head of Customer and Digital Services promised to investigate the issue.

A Member suggested changing the wording of the "Report a Repair" button to "Request a Repair," as the former could imply the repair has already occurred. The

Head of Customer and Digital Services acknowledged this and agreed it would be a useful change.

The idea of having a more curated section of the website for community engagement was raised. Members suggested that, while this would involve some cost, it would help improve communication and foster a more cooperative image for the council. The Head of Customer and Digital Services agreed with this point, indicating that more could be done in this area.

It was **RESOLVED** that the presentation from the Head of Customer and Digital Services be noted.

5 **URGENT PART I DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

There were no Urgent Part I Decisions authorised by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

6 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

7 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. That under Section 100(A) 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.

8 **PART II MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 20 November 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

9 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE CABINET**

The Committee consider the following Part II Decisions of the Cabinet taken on 11 December 2024:

12. HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENTS AND SUNDRY DEBT WRITE OFF GREATER THAN £10,000

The Committee received a report from the Assistant Director (Finance)

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Decisions of the Cabinet be noted.

10 **STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL - WEBSITE**

It was **RESOLVED** that the presentation from the Head of Customer and Digital Services be noted.

11 **URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

There were no Urgent Part II Decisions authorised by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

12 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 21 January 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Myla Arceno, Stephen Booth, Rob Broom, Forhad Chowdhury, Peter Clark, Andy McGuinness, Sarah Mead, Tom Plater, Ceara Roopchand, Anne Wells and Nigel Williams

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.02pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lynda Guy.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 December 2024 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE CABINET

The Committee considered the following Part I Decisions of the Cabinet taken on 15 January 2025:

2. MINUTES - CABINET - 11 DECEMBER 2024

The Committee noted the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 11 December 2024.

3. GARAGES ASSET MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Committee considered the Council's Garages Asset Management Report. The Assistant Director (Stevenage Direct Services) advised the Committee that the purpose of the report was to outline plans for managing garage stock, focussed on repairs, contracts, and budgets. The Committee heard that the Cabinet had held discussions that highlighted the need for ongoing member involvement in monitoring progress.

Cabinet had agreed all recommendations set out in the report.

Members commented regarding the reduction in scope and budgeted spend compared to the previous garage asset management strategy. The shift from whole place renewal of garage sites to a more targeted approach was discussed. The Chief Financial Officer explained this change was largely due to financial constraints, with a focus on addressing key issues such as roof replacements and asbestos management while maintaining functionality. In addition, voids have significantly reduced since the approval of the first garage programme which had used projected increased income to fund borrowing by reducing void garage levels.

Members commented that the current strategy may serve as a "sticking plaster" rather than addressing long-term maintenance needs. The Chief Financial Officer confirmed that the strategy included funding for targeted repairs and other garage components but acknowledged the programme will need a refresh in a few years at a suitable time to assess future needs.

Members queried the management of asbestos works and suggested the use of a nominated subcontractor under the main contractor's supervision to reduce Council management requirements. The Chief Financial Officer clarified that the current approach was based on advice from the Council's property surveyor team.

Members raised questions about the projected cumulative income losses due to disrepair, as outlined in the report. The Chief Financial Officer explained that the figures represented estimates of potential losses if no investment was made, in this scenario income losses would increase annually as more garages would fall into disrepair.

4. COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY 2025 – 28

The Head of Community Advice and Support informed Members that the report on the Community Safety Strategy 2025-28, which outlined the emerging priorities of the SoSafe Partnership for the next three years, had been considered by Cabinet without further amendments and was scheduled for review by full Council.

Cabinet had agreed all recommendations set out in the report.

5. LICENSING ACT 2003 - REVIEW OF STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY

The Interim Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation) informed the Committee that the review, required every five years, outlined the Council's regulatory role and approach as the Licensing Authority. A new recommendation, introduced at the General Purposes Committee (4th December 2024), was included in the Cabinet report.

The Committee heard that the introduction of the Council as a "responsible authority" for enforcement was well received by Cabinet members.

The Interim Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation) advised Members of the need to amend the constitution to grant the Head of Environmental Health and Licensing the necessary delegation for the responsible authority role.

Cabinet had agreed all recommendations set out in the report.

A Member questioned the use of rateable value for licence fee determination. The Head of Environmental Health & Licensing clarified that fees were set by regulations (unchanged since 2005) and could not reflect full cost recovery.

6. GAMBLING ACT 2005 - REVIEW OF STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

The Interim Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation) advised the Committee that this statutory review, required every three years, focused on how the Council regulated gambling premises. The policy aimed to protect the most vulnerable in the community, ensuring robust measures are in place to address gambling harms and received support at the General Purposes Committee and Cabinet meetings.

Cabinet had agreed all recommendations set out in the report.

A Member highlighted unclear wording in section 3.13 of the report, suggesting redrafting for clarity.

Members questioned assumptions linking gambling harm with income levels. Officers clarified that the local area profile helped identify potential risks, with no specific evidence of significant gambling harms in Stevenage.

Members commented about gambling addiction observed in the community. Officers assured collaboration with the Gambling Harms Alliance and ongoing efforts to address harms through a new Gambling Harms Strategy introduced in January 2025.

7. CONSULTATION ON AN AMENDMENT TO TWO ARTICLE 4 DIRECTIONS TO REQUIRE CHANGES OF USE FROM CLASS E(G)(I) (OFFICES AND CLASS E(G)(III) (LIGHT INDUSTRIAL) TO CLASS C3 (RESIDENTIAL) TO OBTAIN PLANNING PERMISSION

The Interim Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation) advised the Committee that Article 4 directions were used to remove permitted development rights, requiring developers to submit full planning applications rather than relying on prior approval processes. This ensured the Council could protect key employment areas, aligning with local policies, particularly as prior approvals did not account for those policies.

The Committee heard that the amendments aimed to align the Council's Article 4 directions with updated central government regulations and ensure they remained enforceable. This process required consultation and engagement with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

The Interim Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation) advised the Committee that Cabinet members had recognised the importance of mitigating the impact of developments on employment areas and supported the amendments.

Cabinet had agreed all recommendations set out in the report.

Members queried whether the amendments represented new powers for the Council. Officers clarified that the powers had existed for several years but required updates to reflect legislative changes, ensuring they remained enforceable, and the Council retained control over certain developments.

Members raised questions about potential Class E premises that could be converted to residential use. Officers noted that Class E was broad, covering shops, restaurants, and offices, with central government promoting deregulation to deliver more homes. However, implementing Article 4 directions required robust evidence, and many councils had faced challenges when attempting to apply those in town centres.

The Head of Planning Policy explained the robust evidence submitted in 2022 to justify the existing Article 4 directions, which had been reviewed and remained relevant. They confirmed that amendments were consistent with the latest regulations and that the Council was confident in its approach.

8. COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL): DRAFT CHARGING SCHEDULE – PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Interim Assistant Director (Planning and Regulation) provided an overview of the update to the Council's CIL Charging Schedule. The update aligns charges with inflation and new policies, including those related to climate change. Extensive viability testing has been conducted to ensure charges are reasonable and do not undermine the Local Plan. The second round of statutory consultation is set to commence, with the aim of submitting the schedule for examination alongside the Local Plan.

Cabinet had agreed all recommendations set out in the report.

Members queried whether considerations for setting the CIL rate were purely economic or incorporated other factors, such as climate change. Officers explained that viability testing accounted for development costs, including sustainability requirements, and balanced charges to avoid discouraging development. The process involved consultancy support and public documentation of findings.

Members commented about CIL income distribution, specifically the allocation of 15% to communities. The Chief Financial Officer confirmed that these allocations had happened and offered to circulate further information.

Members questioned the exclusion of specific premises from the town centre zone on the map. Officers clarified that the map aligned with the current Local Plan, which defined these areas as edge-of-centre, based on evidence from earlier consultations.

Members asked whether CIL charges varied by development size. Officers confirmed that charges were based on gross floor area, with thresholds for exemptions (e.g., affordable housing). They confirmed that developers were legally

required to pay.

Members queried the differing rates for sheltered housing versus extra care housing. Officers explained that rates were set following viability testing and population forecasts. It was determined that the rates would not hinder future development.

Members further explored how increased affordable housing provision impacted CIL income. Officers acknowledged the logical connection but emphasised the Council's commitment to delivering affordable housing.

Members questioned how the public consultation would be conducted. Officers outlined the approach, including notifications to stakeholders, social media announcements, and hard copies of documents being made available. They confirmed that the methods mirrored those used in the first consultation round, adhering to the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

9. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) - FINAL BUDGET AND RENT SETTING 2025/26

The Chief Financial Officer introduced the updated HRA report, noting updates based on scrutiny comments and pressure on repairs quantified for 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The Committee heard that, to address increased costs, borrowing had been utilised instead of a £5 million revenue contribution to capital, adding an annual cost of approximately £280,000.

The Chief Financial Officer advised the Committee that the report included a statement acknowledging risks to the HRA.

Cabinet had agreed all recommendations set out in the report.

10. DRAFT GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2025/26

The Chief Financial Officer presented the draft report, updating members on budget shortfalls.

The Committee heard that the report proposed a council tax increase of 2.99% and that the updated budget avoided service cuts for 2025/26.

Cabinet had agreed all recommendations set out in the report.

Members commented about council tax reductions for disabled groups asking questions relating to:

- Application deadlines relative to the start of the council tax year.
- Eligibility requirements for disability-related discounts.
- Backdating of discounts for late applications.

The Chief Financial Officer clarified that discounts were generally backdated based on proven financial circumstances and offered to provide a detailed note from the

Revenues and Benefits team. They also highlighted support available for vulnerable residents to complete applications.

Members asked about the proposed council tax increase of 2.99% versus the MTFS assumption of 1.99%. The Chief Financial Officer explained that the additional 1% made a contribution to the General Fund's savings target and this helped avoiding service reductions. The CFO also identified that in previous year's increases had been below inflation rises. The CFO acknowledged that savings were required for 2026/27 onwards and plans for potential savings were under review for future years but emphasised the importance of balancing the medium-term financial position.

Members praised the reintroduction of the Graduate and Apprenticeship Scheme. The Chief Financial Officer explained its funding through business rate gains, addressing recruitment challenges for hard-to-fill roles.

Members enquired about preceptors' council tax increases. The Chief Financial Officer noted that preceptors had not yet finalised their precepts but provided preliminary figures, including a likely £14 increase on a Band D property for the Police and Crime Commissioner and for the County Council 5%.

11. DRAFT CAPITAL STRATEGY 2024/25-2029/30

The Assistant Director (Finance) presented the draft Capital Strategy.

The Committee heard that the proposed 2025/26 capital programme for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and General Fund was based on the draft budget report from December.

The Committee were informed that updates would be incorporated into the final capital programme for February, reflecting changes presented earlier in the meeting.

The Assistant Director (Finance) informed the Committee that, for the General Fund, £2.6 million in new proposed schemes had been reviewed by officers and members and would be recommended for Council approval in February.

12. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

The Committee noted that there had been no Urgent Part I Business.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part I Decisions of the Cabinet be noted.

4 URGENT PART I DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no Urgent Part I Decisions Authorised by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. That under Section 100(A) 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.

7 **PART II MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 December be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

8 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE CABINET**

The Committee noted that the only Part II Business at the Cabinet meeting held on 15 January 2025 was the minutes of the previous Cabinet meeting.

9 **URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

There were no Urgent Part II Decisions Authorised by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

10 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

CHAIR

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Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Community Advice and Support
Date 12th February 2025



COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY 2025 - 2028

AUTHORS: SARAH PATEMAN
CONTRIBUTOR:
LEAD OFFICER: KERRY CLIFFORD

KEY DECISION

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To present a final version of the draft Community Safety Strategy 2025-28, Appendix A, which outlines the emerging priorities of the SoSafe partnership for the next three years.
- 1.2 It is a statutory requirement under the Crime and Disorder Act 1988 (as amended by the Police and Justice Act 1996) for responsible authorities within an area to formulate and implement a Strategy for the reduction of crime and disorder (including anti-social behaviour adversely affecting the local environment); combatting the misuse of drugs, alcohol, and other substances and for education to prevent re-offending.
- 1.3 The Council's Constitution includes the Community Safety Strategy as a Budget and Policy Framework item and requires the final Strategy to be considered by Cabinet and recommended to Council for adoption.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Cabinet:
 - a) Notes the duty placed on the Council and other responsible authorities to publish and implement a Community Safety Strategy that addresses the reduction of crime and disorder.

- b) Notes the feedback from Cabinet (January 2025) and Overview and Scrutiny Committee (January 2025) and, post consideration, recommends the Community Safety Strategy to Council for approval.
- c) That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (RP) after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities and the So-Safe partnership, to agree and publish an annual Community Safety Action Plan and to make minor amendments to the Strategy.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Community Safety is about feeling safe whether at home, in the community or at work. Stevenage is changing at speed with new homes being built and investment being made in the town to develop its commercial, food & beverage and leisure / cultural offers.
- 3.2 Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) were introduced by Section 6 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and brings together local partners to formulate and implement strategies to tackle crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour in their communities.
- 3.3 The responsible authorities that make up the Stevenage Community Safety Partnership are:
 - Stevenage Borough Council
 - Hertfordshire Constabulary
 - National Probation Service
 - Hertfordshire County Council
 - Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service
 - Local voluntary services
- 3.4 Community Safety Partnerships are also required to develop effective annual action plans to ensure that the priorities set out in the Strategy are achieved.
- 3.5 This Strategy will ensure that the SoSafe Community Safety Partnership utilises its resources in the most effective manner possible to deliver meaningful crime reduction outcomes. SoSafe is committed to building on progress achieved in recent years and will strive to continue to drive down crime and disorder in Stevenage. In the last three years, partners have continued to work to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour and Crime. SoSafe has introduced initiatives that have supported some of the most vulnerable people in the town making best use of partners' resources and targeting them effectively.
- 3.6 SoSafe actively engages with residents and facilitates co-production of interventions through consultation sessions, various forums, satisfaction surveys and forums. Working with members of the community enhances the profile of the Partnership and co-operative working.
- 3.7 The proposed Strategy accompanies this report. It is suggested that, subject to Members approving the Strategy for implementation, it should be adopted by the SoSafe partnership at its next meeting in April 2025.
- 3.8 The key points for consideration are set out in the following sections of the report which outline the rationale upon which the recommendations are presented.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 The new SoSafe Community Safety Strategy 2025-2028 builds on the previous Strategy and the key achievements that have been made against the previous five key priorities as identified below.

For the period **2021/24** the identified priorities were:

- Divert young people from becoming involved in crime and ASB.
- Provide safe reporting and support to domestic abuse survivors and victims of modern slavery.
- Promote reporting of hate crime and further promote equality in the community.
- Tackle the harms caused by drugs and alcohol.
- Work with partners to encourage reporting of crime and address perceptions of crime.

These priorities were underpinned by two overarching objectives to:

- Consult with the community and work co-operatively with partners and residents.
- Promote reporting of crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

4.2 During April-October 2024, the SoSafe Community Safety Partnership engaged with key local partners to help shape the draft Strategy. The themes for the Strategy were further developed through engagement with residents and visitors to the town and were captured through social media consultations, surveys with clients and from data collected via the police Echo platform. The Council has engaged with over 1,200 residents and partners through the various consultation channels and the feedback gained, along with data from annual strategic assessments and information shared at both Partnership and client led meetings, has been analysed and used in the development of the Strategy.

4.3 The SoSafe partnership also actively engages with residents and facilitates co-production of interventions through consultation sessions, various forums, satisfaction surveys and working groups. Working directly with members of the community enhances the profile of the Partnership and co-operative working as well as giving live feedback during the duration of the Strategy.

4.4 Following consultation, the six key priorities identified and proposed for **2025-2028** are as follows:

<p>Highlight the risks to the community of drug possession and crime.</p>	<p>Determined as a result of the community views collected anonymously through the Police’s Echo system. It has been identified that the biggest concern in Stevenage relates to drug use or dealing.</p>
<p>Provide safe reporting and support to victims of Violence Against Women and Girls, including Domestic abuse.</p>	<p>After completing a review of the Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment and consultations with the community, it is clear that Violence Against Women and Girls, including domestic abuse remains a matter of key concern. The SADA service recorded 1551 referrals for 2023-2024. For this reason, reducing Violence Against Women and Girls, including domestic abuse is a priority. The SoSafe Partnership have established a Violence Against Women and Girls action plan.</p>

<p>Promote awareness of Cuckooing and the support available to victims.</p>	<p>Cuckooing has been identified as a local priority as part of the Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment. Hertfordshire County Council have released a Cuckooing Pathway and Practice Guide to support agencies in relation to supporting victims of cuckooing.</p>
<p>Divert individuals from becoming involved in Anti-Social Behaviour.</p>	<p>The inclusion of this priority reflects community views collected through resident consultations, street-meets and the Police's Echo system identifying that anti-social behaviour; including noise and vehicle nuisance, drug dealing and parking remains of great concern to residents.</p>
<p>Collaborate with Partners and Young People regarding the risks around County Lines and associated Anti-Social Behaviour.</p>	<p>As a result of The Community Safety Partnership Strategic Assessment and feedback from partnership working with local schools addressing County Lines is recognised to be a local priority. Local intelligence also highlights concerns around gang culture and peer pressure.</p>
<p>Raise awareness around online fraud and the warning signs to the community.</p>	<p>As a consequence of concerns raised by the community at various resident feedback sessions and through engagement with partnership agencies, it has been agreed that online fraud will be a local priority.</p>

The priorities above are underpinned by two proposed overarching objectives:

- Engage with the community and work co-operatively with partners/residents and those that visit the town.
- Work with the community to increase the reporting of crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB).

4.5 Alongside the Strategy, a detailed action plan is produced each year, which identifies how SoSafe will achieve its aims and objectives. A copy of the action plan is attached at Appendix C. The action plan contains specific targets and is monitored, updated, and reviewed regularly ahead of each SoSafe meeting. The Action Plan is a working document that is updated as crime trends change and new problem-solving strategies to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour are implemented.

4.6 The Community Safety Strategy has been developed with due regard to the following:

- National developments and changes to legislation
- Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) plan Everybody's Business
- Annual Strategic Assessment for Stevenage 2023/2024
- County Community Safety Unit (CCSU) domestic abuse strategy and the Survivors Against Domestic Abuse Strategy
- CCSU drugs and alcohol strategy
- Hertfordshire's Criminal Justice Board Strategy 2022-2025
- Historical and Current Crime Data.
- Customer Surveys
- Police Echo data

- 4.7 The draft Strategy was approved for consultation by Cabinet at its meeting on the 15 of January 2025.
- 4.8 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had an opportunity to comment on the draft strategy at its meeting on the 21st January. No substantive comments were made.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

- 5.1.1 The Council will utilise existing resources to support implementation of the strategy. It is recognised that several existing activities which are securing positive impacts are reliant on time-limited funding which includes that from external sources. Given budgetary constraints within local government and the wider public sector, some of these activities will remain at risk unless sufficient core or external funding can be identified. SoSafe will continue to work with other commissioners and funders to help lever in investment wherever possible, this includes match-funding or pump priming opportunities related to specific initiatives and projects. Stevenage Borough Council have previously committed to funding internal services including Survivors Against Domestic Abuse, The No More Service and The Welfare, Benefit and Debt Advice team to enable residents and customers to access continued support.

5.2 Legal Implications

- 5.2.1 Production of the strategy is a statutory requirement under the Crime and Disorder Act 1988 (as amended by the Police and Justice Act 1996). This act requires the responsible authorities for an area to formulate and implement a strategy for the reduction of crime and disorder (including anti-social behaviour adversely affecting the local environment); combatting the misuse of drugs, alcohol, and other substances and for the education of re-offending in the area.

5.3 Risk Implications

- 5.3.1 The strategic commitment of key stakeholders in the development and implementation of the strategy will help mitigate key risks such as focussing on the wrong priorities or those over which the partners have little impact or influence. Risks will continue to be considered as interventions develop through the ongoing work of the SoSafe Partnership.

5.4 Policy Implications

- 5.4.1 The Strategy links into other key SBC policies and Strategies including the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults and the health and wellbeing strategy, and SADA Domestic Abuse Strategy.

5.5 Staffing and Accommodation Implications

- 5.5.1 Community Safety is an overarching commitment. Officers in various positions across Community Advice & Support and Housing and Investment support implementation of the Strategy and the SoSafe Action Plan and other related policies and procedures.

5.6 Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.6.1 The Council is committed to providing high quality services that are relevant to the needs and responsive to the views of all sections of the local community, irrespective of their race, gender, disability, culture, religion, age, sexual orientation, or marital status. The General Equality Duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) requires the Council to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in the exercise of its functions.
- 5.6.2 A full Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed, considering the implications of the Strategy for all communities. A copy of this Assessment is attached at Appendix D.
- 5.6.3 There is recognition that crime and anti-social behaviour can disproportionately impact upon those with protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act. The emphasis on Hate Crime as part of the Strategy highlights the potential for this to happen at a local level. The partnership will be working with the community to encourage reporting of Hate Crime and further promote equalities across our communities. SoSafe strives to engage the community in the design and delivery of the interventions which tackle crime and drive down disorder and anti-social behaviour. Relationships will continue to be built with groups around the town, including those from different faiths, different communities, women, girls, and older people. It will be essential to ensure interventions meet specific needs for different parts of the community and are delivered in a meaningful and empowering way. The SoSafe Partnership works with the Equalities Commission and other partners to set up to explore the particular challenges facing people living in Stevenage and seeks to pro-actively tackle community safety issues as they emerge.

5.7 Service Delivery Implications

- 5.7.1 The Strategy will influence and shape the work of the SoSafe Partnership, and its delivery strands are clearly aligned back to the outcomes that are sought. This will also apply to the function of the Responsible Authorities Group that will oversee delivery of the strategy reporting to Stevenage Together.

5.8 Information Technology Implications

- 5.8.1 The Team have established understanding and use of the REACT system, as well as Jigsaw and NEC.

6 APPENDICES

Appendix A – Draft Community Safety Strategy 2025/28

Appendix B – SoSafe Action Plan

Appendix C – EQIA

Working Together to Make Stevenage Even Safer



Community Safety Strategy 2025/2028



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Foreword

I am pleased to present SoSafe's Community Safety Strategy for 2025/28. It outlines some of our successes and our priorities over the next three years and the actions we will take to address them.

Stevenage is a co-operative council that prides itself on collaborative working with partners and our communities. SoSafe will continue to address the issues our residents, visitors and those that work in our town see as a priority, by involving you in the decision making and by consulting with you.

In future years, as in the past three years, our priorities are what the people of the town have told us they want to see us focusing on. We have refreshed and focused our priorities following a local assessment of safety, crime, disorder and ASB in the town, which was supported by the results of consultation. There have been a number of new government policies and strategies, as well as legislative changes since the last Strategy, some of which have placed additional duties on Community Safety partners, and this new Strategy will ensure that these developments are reflected locally through robust multi-agency plans and joined-up working.

Within this Strategy there is an increased focus on violence and anti-social behaviour, setting out what we will do to tackle this, in recognition of the level of harm and fear that these can bring to communities. This reflects the national focus on serious violence and anti-social behaviour as outlined in the government's ASB Action Plan and in the measures around serious violence set out in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act.

The SoSafe Community Safety Partnership approaches the next three-year plan from a sound foundation of achievement. However, challenges remain, and we want to do more. By working together in partnership with agencies and local communities we can tackle the root causes of crime, disorder, and anti-social behaviour, and break the generational cycle to build a safer, stronger community.

Matt Partridge
Chief Executive



Matt Partridge

I am pleased to introduce our SoSafe Community Safety Strategy for the town for the next three years. In the past three years we have built strong relationships and working together, the Partnership has enjoyed many successes in reducing crime and antisocial behaviour, protecting, and supporting people with vulnerabilities. We are proud of these achievements, but there is more for us to do. The nature of crime and antisocial behaviour, and the impact upon individuals and our communities, are constantly evolving.

As a Partnership we must also evolve in our response, continuing to listen, learn, improve, and develop our approach and our ways of working. Over the next three years SoSafe will be working hard together with partner agencies and the community to continue to make Stevenage a safe place for everyone.

SoSafe is committed to building on progress made in recent years and will continue to work to reduce crime and disorder across Stevenage. Our partnership is strong and benefits from the clear commitment from a range of local organisations. SoSafe remains passionate about supporting the wellbeing of our residents, the town and creating safe environments for all of our communities. As there continues to be unprecedented pressures on public sector funding; this strategy will ensure that, as a co-operative council, we are effectively utilising all available resources to achieve value for money.

The values that underpin this strategy are based on co-operation. We will only tackle crime and anti-social behaviour through a shared approach, reliant on our residents and our partners. Over the following pages we have outlined those activities we have undertaken over the past 3 years and our plans for the next 3 years. I hope by reading this strategy you will see how SoSafe is working for the benefit of us all now and into the future.

Councillor Conor McGrath
Portfolio Holder – Stronger Communities



Councillor Conor McGrath

Introduction to SoSafe

SoSafe (Stevenage Community Safety Partnership [CSP]) is a strategic partnership, working to reduce crime and offending in accordance with the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. SoSafe is made up of key agencies that each bring their own unique specialism to the partnership. By working collaboratively with partners and our local communities, we have been able to make significant changes to the lives of those people who need support, guidance, and advice, whilst tackling crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour.

The CSP includes the following organisations:

- Stevenage Borough Council (SBC)
- Hertfordshire Constabulary
- National Probation Service
- Hertfordshire County Council (HCC)
- Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS).
- Local voluntary services

This strategy provides a framework for the many activities and initiatives that the partnership aims to deliver to improve community safety and community confidence in the town. Following consultation with members of the public and partners, this strategy identifies the priorities that SoSafe will focus on over the next three years.

Alongside this strategy, a detailed action plan is produced each year, which shows how SoSafe will achieve its aim and objectives. It contains specific targets and is monitored, updated, and reviewed regularly.

The Community Safety Strategy has been developed with due regard to the following:

- National developments and changes to legislation
- Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) plan Everybody's Business
- Annual Strategic Assessment for Stevenage 2023/2024
- County Community Safety Unit (CCSU) domestic abuse strategy and the Survivors Against Domestic Abuse Strategy
- CCSU drugs and alcohol strategy
- Hertfordshire's Criminal Justice Board Strategy 2022-2025
- Historical and Current Crime Data.
- Customer Surveys
- Police Echo data
- Partnership Consultation

SoSafe could not achieve its objectives without help from the public. It is the duty of all citizens to play their part in making their communities safer. People can contribute by reporting crime and disorder, supporting criminal justice agencies, and by taking responsibility for their personal safety and the safety of others.

For ideas on other ways to get involved, please visit our website: [Community Safety Partnership \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/community-safety-partnership)

Stevenage Community Safety Partnership

Strategic

Operational

SoSafe Strategic Partners Group (SSSPG)

Responsible authorities are under a statutory duty to ensure partnership work is in place within the Community Safety Partnership (CSP). The group meet regularly to review the strategic action plan, evaluate progress against identified priorities and share information

The responsible authorities are:

- Stevenage Borough Council (SBC)
- Hertfordshire Constabulary
- Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue (HFRS)
- East and North Herts Clinical Commissioning Group (ENHCCG)
- Hertfordshire County Council - Children's Services (HCC)
- County Community Safety Unit (CCSU)
- BeNCH Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC)

Co-operating bodies are:

- Police and Crime Commissioner's Office

Each responsible authority has the statutory duty to nominate a Designated Liaison Officer, whose role is to proactively facilitate information sharing between partners, ensure legislation is adhered to and that at least the minimum information sharing requirements are complied with.

Chair: Matt Partridge; Chief Executive, SBC
Meet: Quarterly

Identify & Review

Deliver & Report

County groups

- Community Safety Managers (CSM) meetings
- Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)
- Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
- Domestic Abuse Risk Management Sub Group
- Herts Safeguarding Board

Youth action Panels

- Drug & Alcohol Networking meeting
- Multi Agency (MACE) Child Exploitation Group

Community Safety Strategy

1. Divert young people from becoming involved in crime and ASB
2. Provide safe reporting and support to domestic abuse survivors and victims of modern slavery
3. Promote reporting of Hate Crime and equality in the community
4. Tackle the harms caused by drugs and alcohol
5. Work with partners to encourage reporting of crime and address perception of crime

Joint Action Group (JAG)

JAG is an operational, multi-agency group responsible for delivering the Community Safety Action Plan. The group meet regularly to update on action points, identify any emerging problems and develop resolutions and initiatives aimed at reducing levels of crime and antisocial behaviour (ASB). The group also review and monitor community safety funding grants and ensure money is spent appropriately to deliver the priorities and issues identified.

The agencies involved include:

- Stevenage Borough Council – Community Safety; ASB; Safeguarding; Licensing; CCTV; No More Service; Homelessness; Environmental Health and Enforcement
- Hertfordshire Constabulary – ASB and Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT)
- Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue (HFRS)
- Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) – Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS) and Trading Standards
- Youth groups – Youth Connexions; YMCA and Child UK
- Spectrum CGL
- Stevenage Haven homeless shelter
- Local housing associations

Chair: Insp Nick Redfearn, Mel Cucos and Jessica Warren

Multi-agency groups

- **Multiple Needs Working Group**
SBC Meet: Six-weekly
- **Healthy Relationships Healthy Babies**
Meet: Quarterly
- **Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) Working Group**
Meet: Six-weekly
- **Stevenage Domestic Abuse Forum**
Meet: Monthly

Action Plan Priorities 2024/25

1. Tackling All ASB
2. Serious Violence
3. Cuckooing
4. Drugs, Possession and Associated crime
5. Violence Against Women and Girls
6. County Lines and Serious & Organised Crime

Police and Crime Commissioners Community Safety and Criminal Justice Plan

- Offender Pays
- Victims at the centre
- Business sense
- Public focus
- Protect local policing

Equalities

Under the Equality Act (2010) the Council has a legal duty to fulfil the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). Through this duty and in the application of this strategy, the council will carry out its functions in a way that:

- a. Removes discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is unlawful under the Equality Act (2010)
- b. Promotes equal opportunities between people who have a protected characteristic(s) and those who don't
- c. Encourages good relations between people who have a protected characteristic(s) and those who don't

Further information on the Council's fulfilment of the Equality Act (2010) is set out in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy (2022) and Reasonable Adjustment Policy (2024).

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Data Protection

The Council regards respect for the privacy of individuals and the lawful and careful treatment of personal information as very important to delivery of services.

The Council will ensure that it treats personal information lawfully and proportionately as set out in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act (2018). For further information on the Councils approach to handling information please see [Data Protection Act \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/data-protection-act).

Findings from the Partnership Consultation and Customer Surveys

We asked members of the community: what makes Stevenage a safe place to live, work and visit? Some of the responses included:

- *Good Community Spirits*
- *Strong Police Presence*
- *Strong Response to Anti-Social Behaviour*
- *Good Levels of CCTV*
- *Well-lit areas.*

We also asked members of the community if there was anything that makes Stevenage unsafe. Some of the responses included:

- *Drug Use/Drug Dealing*
- *Anti-Social Behaviour*
- *Youth Nuisance*
- *Cuckooing*
- *Violence Against Women and Girls*

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The Police have also been collecting community views through their anonymous Echo system. The most talked about topic in Stevenage relates to drug use or dealing. This is followed by anti-social behaviour including noise and vehicle nuisance, drug dealing and parking.

Using local data, and information received from the public and elected members, we asked members of the community to vote and comment on the six aims proposed for this strategy. 89% of votes agreed with the priorities proposed:

- *Highlight the risks to the community of drug possession and crime.*
- *Provide safe reporting and support to victims of violence against women and girls, including Domestic abuse.*
- *Promote awareness of Cuckooing and the support available to victims.*
- *Divert individuals from becoming involved in Anti-Social Behaviour.*
- *Collaborate with Partners and Young People regarding the risks around County Lines and associated Anti-Social Behaviour.*
- *Raise awareness around online fraud and the warning signs to the community.*

These findings, together with talking to residents through surveys and events have helped us to determine our SoSafe aims and objectives for the next three years and influence our Action Plan. As our action plan is a live document, engaging with residents is an ongoing and key part of our approach as a co-operative Council. Throughout 2021 we completed a resident's survey which we will look to do again in Spring of 2025 to develop our understanding of resident views which will help us to update our action plan throughout 2025-2028.

Achievements

The themes for the 2021/2024 strategy and the 2025/2028 were developed through engagement with residents and visitors to the town through social media consultations, surveys with clients and data collected from the police Echo platform. We also analysed data from strategic assessments and information shared at both partnership and client led meetings to develop our strategies and direct our achievements and future aims.

What we did in 2021/2024	What we are aiming to do in 2025/2028
Listened to community and together with partners implemented “build a better bedwell”, supported with funding from The Home Office’s Safer Streets Fund.	Co-operative working with external partners, The No More Service and The Rough Sleeper team to focus on highlighting the dangers of drug and alcohol among vulnerable people.
Worked with survivors of Domestic Abuse to support key areas, including Safeguarding of Children and Vulnerable Adults, and implementing a direct duty number for customers to contact the SADA service directly.	Implement a Violence Against Women and Girls partnership action plan to highlight the concerns around domestic abuse, rape and other sexual offences, stalking, ‘honour-based’ abuse as well as many others, including offences committed online.
Introduced youth interventions into local schools in Stevenage focusing on Peer Pressure, County Lines, and the dangers of drug use.	Continue to work with local schools and run awareness sessions with years 6 and 7 classes in relation to Peer Pressure, County Lines, and the dangers of drug use.
Attended “street-meets” within the local community in partnership with the Police and other agencies.	Further embed the work with partners and the community to encourage the reporting of Anti-social behaviour and use social media platforms to inform the community of positive outcomes.
Supported and raised awareness about Hate Crime around the Third-Party reporting centres across the town.	Using our various social media platforms and partner platforms, highlight issues around online fraud and the warning signs to the community.

Key differences between 2021/2024 and 2025/2028 strategies

We continue to take a co-operative approach with partner agencies, volunteers, and residents to help make Stevenage a safer place to live, visit and work. The 2025/28 Community Safety Strategy highlights how we work together by using multi-agency problem solving methods and consulting with the community of Stevenage. The aim is to promote effective long-term change and to tackle crime and ASB. We have continued to monitor crime rates throughout the last three-year period through Police Priority Setting meetings. These meetings, which take place every three months, consider the crime and ASB concerns within local communities and then set the community priorities for the following quarter.

During 2021/24, our focus was on deterring communities away from ASB and crime as well as providing support to those that need it. As part we have implemented schemes to drive out organised crime and improving the quality of life for local residents. These projects have been targeted around supporting children and vulnerable adults to mitigate any risk around exploitation or criminal behaviour.

We continue to prioritise safeguarding people. The partnership provides safe reporting together with support for victims of hate crime, domestic abuse survivors, victims of modern slavery. The Safe Space innovative approach continues to expand as it aims to meet the needs of victims and survivors. We also provide domestic abuse perpetrator intervention through the No More Services; this includes providing 1-1 support to change offending behaviour and housing for perpetrators. This project allows us to safeguard victims of domestic abuse by housing and monitoring perpetrators away from their victims.

The end of 2024 has seen the introduction of Transformation at Stevenage Borough Council. Transformation is a journey to alter how the council operates and delivers services to customer to better improve customer experience. Transformation has brought together the Community Advice and Support Team, a large team built by a number of services that all have a collective goal – how can we provide advice and support to our customers? For more information about The Community advice and support team, please visit our website: [Community Advice and Support \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](https://www.stevenage.gov.uk)

The 2025/2028 strategy remains a key component of the Council's focus to continue efforts to tackle crime and help people feel safer. The strategy promotes partnership working to raise awareness and provide support to the residents of Stevenage.

We aim to help people feel safe and supported to report incidents of crime and Antisocial behaviour, helping us identify areas of concern so we can focus on implementing supportive measures in the areas that need them most.

The impact of drugs and alcohol continue to be a concern for the community. We are working co-operatively with residents to encourage the reporting of misuse of drugs and alcohol so we can address these issues. We continue to provide support to our residents with the most complex needs to help them make positive changes to their lifestyle and reduce the disruptive impact that they have on the community. The strategy will also focus partnership working to tackle crime and ASB in the town and help to make Stevenage a safer place to live, work and visit.

Monitoring and Measuring our Performance

The SoSafe Action Plan and the commitment of the partners, and volunteers, are paramount to successfully implementing this strategy. As a co-operative council we are aware that we can achieve more by working together to deliver the services that ensure SoSafe achieves its objectives and delivers for the needs of the town.

The SoSafe partnership must rely on existing resources and making additional funding applications.

Below is a list of some of the successful External Funding Bids secured in 2021-2024:

SADA	Stevenage/Survivors Against Domestic Abuse	£1,423,000.00
Safer Streets	Supporting the work in Bedwell to help make the area safer	£350,000.00
Family Intervention	Supporting families to sustain their tenancies	£72,000.00
Tacking youth crime	The No More youth project	£399,000.00
Op educa8	Police and partner funding project in schools in Stevenage	£3,000.00

How will we measure performance?

Performance indicators are agreed annually and reflect the agreed priorities and outcomes whilst considering the views of our customers. We will set SMART targets and measure these four times a year to check that we are making progress.

We will report on the progress made at our monthly SoSafe meetings with partners, at the SADA Board meetings and the Responsible Authorities Group (RAG) meetings.

To understand crime and associated disorder the Partnership needs to work together to address the underlying problems. Effective crime reduction relies on the partnership working with our communities to better understand what and where the issues lie. This helps us to direct Partnership resources efficiently and effectively and to deliver services in the right place at the right time.

Crime trends are monitored regularly, and performance against our targets is reported to the SoSafe group. This group includes SoSafe’s most senior managers and the elected councillor with responsibility for community safety. Additionally, elected councillors sit on a scrutiny committee which challenges SoSafe’s performance.

Hertfordshire’s Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) is the elected representative for policing matters who maintains strong links with the county’s CSPs.

So safe Aims

We have established two overarching aims for the 2025/28 strategy:

- Engage with the community and work co-operatively with partners/residents and those that visit the town.
- Work with the community to increase the reporting of crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB).

So safe Objectives

Within So Safe's overarching aims, we have established six key objectives:

1. Highlight the risks to the community of drug possession and crime.
2. Provide safe reporting and support to victims of violence against women and girls, including Domestic abuse.
3. Promote awareness of Cuckooing and the support available to victims.
4. Divert individuals from becoming involved in Anti-Social Behaviour.
5. Collaborate with Partners and Young People regarding the risks around County Lines and associated Anti-Social Behaviour.
6. Raise awareness around online fraud and the warning signs to the community.

How Services Support the Objectives

Objective One - Highlight the risks to the community of drug possession and crime.

Partnership working with No More Service, Adult Offender Protocol, Rough Sleeper Team, Op Educa8, Voluntary Sector organisations, Police and Probation Service.

Objective Two - Provide safe reporting and support to victims of violence against women and girls, including Domestic abuse.

Partnership working with SADA, Beacon, Herts County Council, Police, and other Local Authorities.

Objective Three - Promote awareness of Cuckooing and the support available to victims.

Partnership working with Housing Management, Police, Probation, CGL, No More Service and Rough Sleeper Team.

Objective Four - Divert individuals from becoming involved in Anti-Social Behaviour.

Partnership working with Police, No More service, Rough Sleeper Team, Housing Management, Probation and Neighbourhood Wardens.

Objective Five - Collaborate with Partners and Young People regarding the risks around County Lines and associated Anti-Social Behaviour.

Partnership working with Police, Probation, No More Service, Rough Sleeper Team, and Modern Slavery Service.

Objective Six- Raise awareness around online fraud and the warning signs to the community.

Partnership working with Police, Hertfordshire County Council, Citizens Advice, Welfare benefit Debt advice Team and Trading Standards.



National
Probation
Service



HERTFORDSHIRE
CONSTABULARY

Stevenage
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Objective One – Highlight the risks to the community of drug possession and crime

There were 1,769 drug possession offences and 272 drug trafficking offences recorded in Hertfordshire during 2023, Stevenage saw an increase in drug possession offences. Drug possession and the using of drugs impacts in several ways including crime, ASB, sleeping rough/homelessness and debt including rent arrears.

It is difficult to quantify exactly how much violence is directly linked to drug supply, as this is also exacerbated by lack of co-operation from victims where a drug link is suspected.

Cannabis use and growing for own use continues to be an issue that is not easy to tackle, with some people not even realising that smoking cannabis is illegal. The cultivation in Hertfordshire is heavily driven by cross-border criminality who exploit the private rented accommodation sector to obtain properties for cannabis grows.

What will we do?

Use social media platforms to highlight the dangers of drug use and associated crime. We will work with partners and the community to highlight “hot spot areas” of drug use and associated crime.

Meet with the community through street-meets and other community engagement events to encourage reporting of crime and anti-social behaviour.

We will continue to promote services to engage as many clients as we can. We will continue with clients who are in prison to start their support plans before their release. We will be making contacts with the NHS, including at Lister Hospital and local GPs to encourage them making referrals to the No More Service for support around the misuse of drugs and alcohol. We will continue to work as a partnership to identify members of the community that needs access to support.

We will continue to support people to break the cycle of substance misuse or offending behaviour by putting practical solutions in place to tackle issues that cause or exacerbate this behaviour. By doing this, the No More Service will reduce the impact that drugs; alcohol and crime have on the individual and the community. We work alongside other support and enforcement agencies to take a collaborative approach providing an individually tailored support plan to help break entrenched behaviour. The ethos of the No More Service is to improve the person’s self-worth, help them to achieve positive outcomes (such as housing or a role in the community) enabling and motivating them to break the cycle of crime or substance use.

Objective Two – Provide safe reporting and support to victim of violence against women and girls, including Domestic Abuse

The term 'Violence Against Women and Girls' refers to acts of violence or abuse that we know disproportionately affect women and girls. Crimes and behaviour covered by this term include domestic abuse, rape and other sexual offences, stalking, 'honour-based' abuse (including female genital mutilation and forced marriage), as well as many others, including offences committed online.

Crimes of violence against women and girls are many and varied. While different types of violence against women and girls have their own distinct causes and impacts on victims and survivors, evidence shows that women and girls are disproportionately affected by many of these crimes. These crimes are deeply harmful, not only because of the profound effect they can have on victims, survivors, and their loved ones, but also because of the impact they can have on wider society, freedom and equality.

The most common offences being assaults with injury, assaults without injury and sending letters with the intent to cause distress or anxiety (this offence type includes the sending of texts, emails, social media).

What will we do?

We will produce a Violence Against Women and Girls action plan feeding into local and national agendas which will raise awareness by informing the public about how and where they can

report Violence Against Women and Girls (including domestic abuse), empowering victims to come forward and seek advice from our dedicated Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) team and the volunteers from the SADA Forum.

SADA Drop-in services are currently available to victims of domestic abuse and will be extended to victims of Violence Against Women and Girls. This will provide a method for people to engage with those who are affected by Violence Against Women and Girls and grow their own peer support network. The support is available weekly in both a virtual and face to face capacity.

We will continue to work co-operatively with partners and survivors of domestic abuse to produce services that are customer-led and listen to the voice of the victim and survivor.

The service has been extended to offer support for those that have perpetrated domestic abuse. The aim of this is to provide intensive 1-1 support to change offending behaviour to work with the No More Service to change offender's behaviour by providing 1-1 support to address offending behaviour and complex needs.

Objective Three – Promote awareness of Cuckooing and the support available to victims.

The most prevalent form of known exploitation is 'cuckooing'. By definition: *“Cuckooing is a practice where people take over a person’s home and use the property to facilitate exploitation. It takes the name from cuckoos who take over the nests of other birds. The most common form of cuckooing is where drug dealers take over a person’s home and use it to store or distribute drugs.”*

Victims of cuckooing are usually vulnerable either through drug use or other vulnerabilities (e.g., mental health problems, learning difficulties) and are often subjected to other forms of exploitation including financial, psychological, and sexual exploitation, modern slavery, and drug-related labour (e.g., working as drug runners). Cuckooed properties and victims are also at risk of aggravated burglary and robbery from rival drug lines attacking occupants in order to steal drugs and money.

In Stevenage we have set up a joint process with the police to try and map who may be “vulnerable” to cuckooing and who may be perpetrators.

Cuckooing investigations in Hertfordshire usually fall into one of two scenarios, the first being where drug dealers take over a property, usually of one of their customers, to stay and deal from, the second where class A users will take over the address of other vulnerable persons as somewhere to sleep and associate, as well as consume drugs.

What will we do?

We will work with our partnering agencies to encourage all local organisations working with drug users and/or vulnerable adults to routinely record intelligence of cuckooing and drug supply exploitation.

We will develop an awareness campaign for professionals and the public to identify signs of cuckooing and encourage reporting. Campaigning will include the use of social media platforms and community engagement events.

We will encourage regular recording of cuckooing and drug supply exploitation when identified in adult safeguarding referrals.

Through collaboration with local services and Hertfordshire Constabulary we will utilise powers under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 for prosecuting County Lines offenders where the criminal exploitation of vulnerable victims is involved.

The partnership will work with local services, including voluntary organisations to develop a multi-agency response to support the complex needs of victims of cuckooing.

Objective Four – Divert individuals from becoming involved in Anti-Social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) is any conduct or activity that causes harm to an individual, to a community or to their environment. Incidents of ASB can range from something that is a mild annoyance (but causing harm) to something that causes fear and insecurity. ASB incidents can be one-off events or recurring situations.

Examples of ASB include neighbour nuisance, youth nuisance, fly tipping, begging, littering and graffiti, noise complaints and rowdy or inconsiderate behaviour.

As a Local Authority we have a number of powers to tackle ASB: Criminal Behaviour Orders; Community Protection Notices; Public Space Protection Orders; closure power; dispersal powers; and civil injunctions.

In Stevenage we take a partnership approach to tackling ASB and have joint protocols with the police, this includes Closure Orders, supporting those that need to flee the area and the serving and prosecution of Community Protection Orders.

What will we do?

We will raise awareness in the community and signpost people for support through Prevention programs for young people who are at risk of committing a crime or are involved in Anti-Social Behaviour.

We will work with Hertfordshire Constabulary by using interventions such as behavioural contracts and Community Protection warnings and notices which can be effective for reducing nuisance behaviour.

As a partnership we will introduce more Restorative Justice approaches. This is the practice of victims to meeting or communicating with their offender to explain the real impact of the crime. These approaches can be effective and support community projects.

We will continue with School-based programs, particularly with year 6 and 7 students to educate young people about the risks of committing a crime or becoming involved in Anti-Social behaviour.

We will signpost vulnerable individuals for support through services such as the No More Service to provide ongoing support to an individual that has previously committed crime/ Anti-Social behaviour.

Objective Five – Collaborate with Partners and Young People regarding the risks around County Lines and associated Anti-Social Behaviour

The 2018 Home Office Serious Crime Strategy advises the NPCC definition of a County Line is *“a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas (within the UK), using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line”. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store drugs and money and will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons”*.

Drug supply in Hertfordshire continues to be dominated by the use of “deal” lines, either trafficking into the county remotely or based within Hertfordshire itself. Most known Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) operating in or from Hertfordshire are actively engaged in drug trafficking both Class A and Class B drugs.

In Stevenage we have been running awareness sessions with years 5/6 students in schools and as of 2022 in secondary schools. The aim is to talk to children and young people about peer pressure, County Lines, and gang culture.

Where lines are identified which match the National Crime Agency (NCA) county line definition, these are recorded on the National County Lines Intelligence Collection Matrix (CLICM), which is held by the National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC). In terms of peripheral risk relating to county lines, Hertfordshire has low levels of recorded violence that can be linked or is suspected to be linked to drug dealing.

What will we do?

We will continue to work with partners to offer a specialist youth service to run the No More Youth service in districts across the county. The project works with young people who are at risk of, or already involved in, violent offending, anti-social behaviour, crime or becoming involved in gang culture.

The No More Youth Support Worker provides intensive 1-1 support to assist clients to change their behaviours and make positive choices. Clients are assisted in employment, housing, and education. 150 young people in Stevenage have been referred to the No More Youth Service since the start of the project in 2021.

To complement the support offered by the No More Youth Service we will continue our work with local schools, partners, and the voluntary sector to deliver educational programs within school settings, to raise awareness about the risks surrounding County Lines and associated Anti-Social Behaviour.

Objective Six – Rise awareness around online fraud and the warning signs to the community

Fraud is legislated under the Fraud Act 2006. It can be defined as *“when a person demonstrates dishonest conduct with intent to make a gain; or cause a loss or the risk of loss to another”*.

The National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB) reports that fraud reporting has transitioned back to pre-pandemic levels. National trends have been influenced by new events including the war in Ukraine and the cost-of-living crisis in the UK.

Overall reporting to Action Fraud decreased between 2022 and 2023 but the level of losses has increased, particularly among business victims. During 2023, Action Fraud received 326,199 reports of fraud with a loss of £2.1bn.

There are 49 fraud classifications designated by the Home Office. The top 10 classifications remain unchanged from 2022.

Online Shopping and Auction Fraud remains the most prevalent, followed by Other Advanced Fee Fraud and Cheque, Plastic Card, and Online Bank Account Fraud. In general terms, local reporting tends to mirror the national landscape.

What will we do?

We want to raise awareness to the community that anyone can fall victim to fraud. We will use social media platforms to highlight the dangers of fraud and associated crime. We will be focusing on the various forms in which fraud can occur including, emails, social media, phone calls or in person. Our social media posts will provide advice and guidance that the community can use to keep themselves safe from fraud.

We will work in partnership with agencies to support victims of crime to report their experiences to Trading Standards, Anti-Fraud Services, Action Fraud, and other supporting services.

Often when discussing fraud, the focus is on the financial impact, not the emotional impact. We understand that falling victim to fraud can leave people feeling embarrassed, unsettled, and unsafe, and it can have a lasting impact on confidence.

We know the importance of talking about what's happened and helping people understand that incidents of fraud are increasingly sophisticated and are purposefully designed to posing as people or organisations you would trust. To ensure people know they are not alone or at fault, we will signpost victims to local services who can offer specialised support.

SoSafe Feedback

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Acronyms and Glossary

ASB	Anti-social Behaviour
DASH	Coordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse: domestic abuse, stalking and honour based violence (risk assessment tool)
CCSU	County Community Safety Unit
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
Class A Drugs	Heroin, methadone, cocaine, crack, ecstasy, LSD and amphetamines
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service CPN/W
CPN/W	Community Protection Notice/Warning
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
CSP	Community Safety Partnership
Cuckooing	Cuckooing is a practice where people take over a person's home and use the property to facilitate exploitation. It takes the name from cuckoos who take over the nests of other birds. The most common form of cuckooing is where drug dealers take over a person's home and use it to store or distribute drugs
DA	Domestic Abuse
DHR	Domestic Homicide Review
E&NH CCG	East & North Herts Clinical Commissioning Group
HBV	Honour Based Violence
HCC	Herts County Council
HFRS	Herts Fire and Rescue Service
IOM	Integrated Offender Management
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

LIFE	Local Intervention Fire Education
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
MNWG	Multiple Needs Working Group
NMS	No More Service
NPS	New Psychoactive Substances
NTE	Night Time Economy
OPCC	Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
OWL	Online Watch Liaison
PCC	Police and Crime Commissioner PCSO
PCSO	Police Community Support Officer
RAG	Responsible Authorities Group Strategic meetings with partners that meet quarterly to discuss the towns' Community Safety priorities
RJ	Restorative Justice
SADA	Survivors Against Domestic Abuse
SARA	Scanning, analysis, response and Assessment
SMART	Specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely
SNT	Safer Neighbourhood Team
SOC	Serious Organised Crime
SoSafe	Stevenage community safety Partnership
SoStevenage	Stevenage local strategic partnership
YC Herts	Youth Provision in Stevenage



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Action plan 2024/25

The aims in this action plan were identified through our Annual Strategic Assessment and partnership survey. The aims are:

- Support those reporting or who are victims of crime and or Anti-Social Behaviour
- Work Co-operatively with Partners, elected members, and the community

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The priorities for 2024/25, identified from the strategic assessment are:

- All ASB
- Serious violence
- Cuckooing
- Drugs possession and associated crime, which includes trafficking, cuckooing and knife crime
- VAWG, including domestic abuse sexual assaults, rape, and stalking & harassment
- County lines and Serious & Organised Crime (SOC)
- Fraud has been added following strategic conversations at the SoSafe meeting

They directly relate to the five strategic objectives within the SoSafe Community Safety Strategy 2021-24:

- 1. Understand the underlining causes as to why young people become involved in ASB and crime.**
- 2. Provide safe reporting, accommodations and support to domestic abuse survivors and victims of Modern Slavery.**
- 3. Promote reporting of hate crime and equality in the community and further develop training with staff.**

4. **To tackle fly tipping and related environmental crime co-operatively with partners.**
5. **Work with partners to encourage reporting of crime and address perceptions of crime.**

This action plan also has regard to relevant county wide strategies and the Police and Crime Commissioner's plan; and provides details about how priorities will be addressed by SoSafe throughout the year.

This document records actions that are conducted through partnership working – and is updated by the Joint Action Group (JAG). It **does not** record the work of individual agencies in tackling our priorities.

The action plan will be updated quarterly by the lead officers for each action. This is a 'live' document and will be assessed regularly by JAG considering shifting priorities, emerging issues and financial implications. Through quarterly police and councillor priority setting meetings, local area priorities may be subject to regular change, and may not necessarily directly reflect the priorities within this action plan.

The SoSafe Community Safety Partnership will receive quarterly updates on progress against the action plan. The Police and Crime Commissioner will receive half yearly budget updates.

1. Divert young people from becoming involved in crime and ASB

Aim	Action	Lead	Partners	Resources	Expected outcomes	Progress to date
<p>1.1 Continue to promote the No More Youth service</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 97</p>	<p>Visiting schools and other services to advertise the service</p>	<p>NMS</p>	<p>Police</p>	<p>Leaflets Posters Social Media Campaigns Visits to schools Events</p>		<p>Q1 NMYS – new leaflet completed and is being handing out by the team across Hertfordshire.</p>
	<p>Send messages out via social media</p>		<p>Community Development</p>			<p>Q2 Officers have been attending schools to promote the services and attending partnership events.</p>
	<p>Create posters and leaflets to hand out to individuals we are working</p>		<p>GP surgeries</p>			<p>Q3 Promotion of NMSY at Jackmans community day in Letchworth</p>
	<p>Produce videos on the service to share with partners</p>		<p>CAMHS</p>			<p>Q4</p>
<p>No More Youth team to visit schools in Stevenage to support pupils and teachers</p>	<p>Intensive Family Support Team (IFST)</p>	<p>Look at funding opportunities for 2025/26</p>	<p>SASH</p>			

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 98</p> <p>1.2 Educate young people in the dangers of using and becoming involved with “gangs” and carrying knives</p>	<p>Education campaigns on the impact that drugs have on a person wellbeing, Peer pressure and County Lines.</p>	<p>Police/JAG members</p>	<p>Police</p>	<p>Posters</p>	<p>To provide education to young people to help them make better informed decisions of their actions.</p>	<p>Q1 NMYS has contacted junior schools in Stevenage about Op Educ8 and Leo has three sessions booked in already for The Leys, Giles and Longmeadow.</p>				
	<p>Research project regarding understanding the underlying reasons why young people get involved in crime/ASB</p>		<p>Community Development</p>			<p>Social Media Campaigns</p>	<p>Q2 Overview of schools’ project shared with SoSafe members in July</p>			
	<p>NPCC Drink Driving Campaign</p>		<p>CGL</p>			<p>Visiting schools</p>	<p>Q3 Sceptre week in November: test purchases in retail stores – all passed.</p>			
	<p>Educate young people on the impact their actions have on others in the Community.</p>		<p>Youth Connections</p>			<p>Social Media Campaigns</p>	<p>Q4</p>			
<p>Op Educ8</p>	<p>Herts Road Safety Partnership</p>	<p>JAG Members</p>	<p>JAG Members to lead on review of the Knife crime action plan</p>	<p>To reduce the number of crimes including knives in Stevenage</p>	<p>No More Service</p>	<p>To promote Lives not Knives events facilitated by the police</p>	<p>Youth Offending Teams</p>	<p>Video link</p>	<p>To promote the video ‘Are You Listening’ to help educate young people from the dangers of Child Criminal Exploitation</p>	<p>Q1 Events taking place during school holidays with No More Youth service around the county</p>
<p>1.3 To educate young people about Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)</p>	<p>Promote with partners and schools the ‘Are You Listening’ video</p>	<p>Police</p>	<p>Police</p>	<p>Social Media</p>	<p>To promote the video ‘Are You Listening’ to help educate young people from the dangers of Child Criminal Exploitation</p>	<p>Q1 Events taking place during school holidays with No More Youth service around the county</p>				
	<p>Peer pressure talks in schools</p>		<p>Community Development</p>							
			<p>JAG Members</p>							
			<p>Youth Connections</p>							
			<p>Turnaround Service</p>							

			Herts Fire and Rescue SASH and Youth Offending Team			Q2 HCC are drafting an exploitation JSNA, once completed this will be shared with partners including SoSafe and JAG
						Q3
						Q4

2. Provide safe reporting and support to domestic abuse survivors and victims of modern slavery						
Aim	Action	Lead	Partners	Resources	Expected outcomes	Progress to date
2.1 To promote the Women's Centre and the courses it runs	To invite groups to use the Women's Centre to host training, learning and group sessions	SADA (Tania King)	JAG members Police Community Safety	Existing Staff and Resources Attending schools	To expand the courses run and peer support for victims, survivors, and their families	Q1 Courses have been implemented for 2024/25 – CARE programme, You and Me, Mum
	Promote the "Care" courses use hybrid method for attendance					Courses have been run in North Herts and Stevenage. A foodbank has also been run from the Stevenage drop-in
	Promote the virtual drop in with Housing Associations					Q2 Courses are being expanded to include evening sessions of You and Me, Mum
						Q3
						Q4
2.2 Expansion of SADA refuge provision and safe accommodation	To expand the SADA refuge service across all of Hertfordshire and provide support to victims of Domestic Abuse	SADA (Sarah Pateman)	JAG members Police Community Safety	TBC	To have another refuge for those fleeing Domestic abuse that offers support Support for children and the recognition that they are victims too	Q1 Funding received to continue with the work with children in North Herts £10,000 from the Letchworth Heritage Foundation
	To expand the work with children and capturing their voice					Q2 Further funding has been applied for to continue with the work

						around deprivation, the work in schools for this year commences January 2025
						Q3 Work has commenced with the food bank at North Herts to support clients through the winter months
						Q4
2.3 SADA staff to have IDVA training, You me and mum, modern slavery, and safeguarding	To have team members trained to be able to support visits, survivors, and their families	SADA (Tania King)	Police Women's Aid	Training course	Support for victims, survivors, and their families	Q1 1 member of the team completed management training 1 completed training to become a trainer 2 IDVA qualifications 1 ISVA Qualification
						Q2 Training was completed by the police around VAWG. The training was offered to partner agencies and was well attempted. The training was funded through a central fund which we applied for
						Q3 Work is to commence regarding plotting VAWG offences so we can

						analyse what types of crime are recorded
						Q4
2.4 Continuation and expansion of the County Modern Slavery project	Backpacks to be given around the county to be provided to victims of modern slavery Modern Slavery Action Plan signed off for 2024/25 by SBC/police	SADA (Roxie Chambers)	JAG members Police Community Safety	Backpacks Leaflets Posters	Training for partner agencies being carried out so colleagues have a better understanding and can spot the signs	Q1 Training continues around the county with partners, shared service with NHDC
						Q2
						Q3
						Q4

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Promote reporting of hate crime and equality in the community

Aim	Action	Lead	Partners	Resources	Expected outcomes	Progress to date
3.1 To promote reporting of Hate Crime.	Advertise where the Hate Crime 3 rd party reporting centres are and encourage residents to utilise them when they are needed. For the team to receive ongoing training and know how and where to report Hate Crime	CCSU (Helen Whitehead) SBC	CCSU JAG members Police Housing	The Hate Crime Strategy Social Media Existing staff and resources	Members of the public to be aware of where the Hate Crime 3 rd Party reporting centres are	Q1 Football matches arranges with residents of the IBIS hotel in July, with the Police
						Q2 Training and ongoing work with the NHS at the Lister to encourage the reporting of hate crime
						Q3 Hate crime awareness week and black history month including hate including pitch

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						Q4
	Advertise what the 5 types of Hate Crime are through further social media campaigns and at events	CCSU (Helen Whitehead) SBC	CCSU JAG members Police Housing	Social Media Existing staff and resources	Raising awareness of what the 5 types of Hate Crime are and encouraging individuals to report if they are a victim of Hate Crime.	Q1 MAY - Hate crime leaflet produced in partnership with the police
	Planning group pulled together, following concerns around protests and possible riots in the town.	SoSafe members, Police, SBC	SBC, elected members, Police	Existing staff and resources	Support for ethnic minorities residing in the town and community reassurance	Q2 Reassurance social media posts Q3 The Hate Crime JSNA for the county will be shared with partners Q4

4. Tackle the harms caused by drugs, alcohol and offending.

Aim	Action	Lead	Partners	Resources	Expected outcomes	Progress to date
4.0 Supporting individuals to maintain current accommodation using the Housing Futures Model	Partnership working to ensure the individual is getting all the support they need to help them maintain their accommodation.	SBC (Will Peters/Mel Cucus/Maddy Heredia)	Income Police Debt Advice Team Citizen's Advice Job Centre	Professionals' meetings Food parcels	For individuals struggling with substance misuse to maintain accommodation instead of becoming homeless.	Q1 A team member will be sitting all the MAPPAs across the county as part of the AOP Hertfordshire Project

	Adult Offender Protocol project being rolled out across Hertfordshire with funding from the serious violence fund and probation the project will run for 12 months from April 2024	SBC (Maddy Heredia)	Probation (MAPPA) prisons, approved premises, Public Protection Officers, local authorities			Q2 AOP project is being rolled out across the County with panels taking place for Stevenage, East Herts, Broxbourne, and Watford during August
	DA perps being supported as part of the Evolve programme can access two properties managed by NMS	SBC (Mel Cucos)	Probation Police Debt Advice	Two self-contained flats Food parcels		Q3 NMS Evolve properties for high-risk offenders continue to be inhabited by clients supported by NMS
						Q4
Added August 2024 4.1 Dangerous Dogs	Review process for dealing with dangerous dogs internally, update partners and website	SBC (Sarah Pateman, Karen Long, Donna Smith)	Co-operative Teams	Existing resources	Process to be written following meetings with Environmental Health	Q1 N/A
			JAG members			Q2 Initial meeting took place 13/08/24
						Q3 Further meeting took place with Environmental Health who are looking into the legislation further and powers available

						Q4
4.2 Develop a robust partnership process to support those who have experienced Cuckooing	Review the process implemented in 2023/24 and report to SoSafe Meeting Qtr3	SBC (Jessica Warren/Maddy Heredia/Mel Cucos)	Co-operative Neighbourhood teams JAG members	Existing staff and resources	Partners know the process and how to refer	Q1 Continuing to work with Police and partners to support victims of cuckooing including holding street meets in areas where we believe someone is being cuckooed.
	Work with partners to create a cuckooing process to help and support victims of cuckooing.	Police			To create a standard process to support victims of cuckooing and a fleeing framework to support them to leave their home and flee to another safe area.	Q2 Received cuckooing leaflets that have been distributed at events to make residents aware of the signs their neighbours may have been cuckooed.
	Work with partners through JAG so they know the process and how to refer Continue to use Police leaflet to inform residents of signs of cuckooing and what to report Work with the police on the review of the Serious & Organised Crime profiles	Police (SOC team) SBC Sarah Pateman				Q3 Shared social media messaging from HSAB's campaign to coincide with ASB Week (18-24 November)

	Build a better Bedwell & Safer Streets funding, report for SoSafe in Q3	SBC Jane Konopka	Police Housing Rough Sleeper Team			Q4
Page 106	<p>4.3 Educate all drivers on the effects of drugs/alcohol and the Fatal 5</p> <p>Develop educational programmes (some online) to be delivered into schools, colleges and directly to vulnerable groups</p> <p>Raise awareness and educate the public about illegality of e-scooters</p> <p>Seasonal drink driving awareness campaign</p>	Suzanne Aldridge (HCC) Hertfordshire Road Safety Partnership	Police HFRS PCC Road Victims Trust National Highways	Existing staff and resources	To reduce the amount of killed and seriously injured on Hertfordshire roads.	Q1 Young driver/passenger programme offered to schools and colleges free of charge
						Q2 Visits to schools and colleges during safety events
						Q3 Designed education SM comms packages for distribution and include VMS
						Q4 Attended older people's safety events and other engagement activities.
4.4. Expand "Evolve" in supporting perpetrators of domestic abuse	Further develop the Evolve model to support perpetrators under the age of 18	SBC (Mel Cucos)	NMS For Baby's Sake Change Project Probation	Existing staff and resources	RESPECT Accredited To reduce the number of repeat DA perpetrators in Hertfordshire.	Q1 Evolve youth program, now offered across Herts as part of the NMYS

	Review the two properties that support the Evolve project and the clients that have been through the program	Home Office Sarah Harris	Police SADA			Two houses for the Evolve perpetrator programme are up and running.
						Q2 A member of the SADA Board visited NMS Evolve properties and will feed back to the Board at the next meeting.
						Q3
						Q4

5. Work with partners to encourage reporting of crime and address perceptions of crime

Aim	Action	Lead	Partners	Resources	Expected outcomes	Progress to date
5.0 Promote the use of Crime Stoppers to report crimes anonymously, and encourage sign-ups to Herts	Educate members of the public on what Crime Stoppers is and how to use it	Police	Police	Social Media campaigns Leaflets	An increase in use of Crime Stoppers as more individuals will feel safe reporting crimes and nuisance to the Police	Q1
						Q2
						Q3

Connected and Business Watch	Encourage signups to Business Watch and Herts Connected			Town-wide engagement events Herts Connected platform	An increase in use of Herts Connected platform, as more individuals will feel safe reporting crimes and nuisance to the Police	Q4
5.1 Tackle graffiti, fly-tipping and associated enviro crime Page 108	Review the Graffiti Project, including the work with schools Produce data regarding the amount of fly tipping reported in the town Review data for graffiti and fly-tipping so we can plot the trends throughout the year	SBC (Jessica Warren) Police (NPT Inspector)	JAG members	Social Media Town-wide engagement events	To educate members of the public the importance of reporting so that action can be taken.	Q1 Social media posts have been put out around Environmental Crime and the importance of reporting if someone has evidence of this.
						Q2 Continuing work on a graffiti action plan with partners and councillors. A Steering group has now been put together to tackle this.
						Q3 Meeting held to review graffiti process and highlight any areas for improvement, action plan created
						Q4

5.2 Tackle perceptions of crime, by giving the public the facts, evidence, and statistical information, through social media posts	Use the Herts Connected platform to inform elected members at the Police Priority Setting meetings Continue to identify at events and through consultation what people's perceptions are of ASB and crime Use information from street meets and neighbourhood surveys to review the views of the community regarding nuisance and crime	Police (NPT Inspector) SBC (Jessica Warren)	HFRS Youth Connexions One YMCA Play Centres Targeted Youth Support Fire & Rescue JAG members	Existing staff / resources. Town wide engagement events Herts Connected platform	Increased understanding of the perception of ASB and crime in Stevenage Year-on-year decrease in the perception of ASB and crime. Positive engagement with the community	Q1
						Q2 Echo is now closed. Everything is on Herts Connected.
						Q3
						Q4
	b) Actively promote ECHO and Herts Connected at events	Police (Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator?)	JAG members Housing, Fire & Rescue, Community Development, Wardens	Existing staff / resources. Funding for publicity materials	Campaign undertaken. Positive media stories Social media campaign	

	c) Engage with the community to provide reassurance and develop information around crime.	SBC (Jessica Warren, Community Wardens, Housing staff) Police (NPT Inspector)	Police, Housing, Community Advice & Support, SDS Community Development/ Neighbourhood Wardens	Existing staff / resources	Reports and information provided from patrols ASB forum members reviewing policies/procedures Social media posts Partnership events	We have recently reset up the ASB forum and invited residents who have been through the ASB service in to speak with us and engage with them around the updated ASB Policy and
Page 110	d) Monitor ASB/crime from privately rented accommodation, and review to see if there are any patterns	SBC (Jessica Warren, Community Wardens, Housing staff) Police (NPT Inspector)	Police, Housing, Community Advice & Support, SDS Community Development/ Neighbourhood Wardens	Existing staff / resources	Reports and information provided from patrols ASB forum members reviewing policies/procedures Social media posts Partnership events	We have put out a post on social media to inform residents that cannabis use is illegal and that SBC can and will take action against private rented residents and homeowner as well as SBC tenants.
	5.3 Promote Community Case Reviews (Community Trigger)	Review of Case Reviews to be taken to SoSafe meeting Q4 Promote the use of Community Case reviews with a blog on the website	SBC (Madeline Heredia) Police (NPT Inspector)	JAG members	Leaflets Events Social media	Increased awareness of trigger process Q1 Case reviews are overseen by JAG members Q2 Reviews will take place at the end of the JAG meetings and a report will be shared with SoSafe regarding the numbers and other data including vulnerability of the customer, whether

						<p>they are a tenant, enforcement action taken etc.</p> <p>Q3 Case Reviews continue to be heard by JAG</p> <p>Herts Police improving internal processes in Force Control Room when a Case Review-related call is received</p> <p>Q4</p>
<p>PS S D 1 1</p> <p>4.4 Build Community Resilience for Scams and Fraud</p>	<p>Take action against perpetrators of scams and fraud</p> <p>Educate partners and the public about scams and fraud, to help build community resilience</p>	Trading Standards	JAG members Citizen's Advice Police	Existing staff / resources.	To support the scheme past its pilot stages and grows into a standard scheme within Stevenage.	<p>Q1 Fraud has been highlighted as a priority for 2024/25</p> <p>Q2 Fraud is being highlighted as a hotspot and this will be included in the SoSafe Community Safety Strategy</p> <p>Q3 Citizens Advice created social media messages for the "12 days of scams" to be shared by all partners</p>

						Q4
5.5 Promote the work around the VAWG agenda	Social media campaign highlighting professional resources available to support safeguarding and promote safer cultures	Members of JAG	Police (NPT Inspector) SBC (Mel Cucos)	Existing staff / resources	Increase awareness of resources available	Q1 A VAWG Action plan is being produced in partnership with the Police
	Review the action plan with partners at JAG and reviewed by SoSafe Q3					Q2 A piece of work is taking place regarding the reporting of crime under this heading, they will be reviewed at the SoSafe meeting
	Capture the voice of women and girls through surveys and interviews, to build and understand needs in Stevenage	Tania King (SBC) HCC Police				Q3 Police presentations at North Herts college to students, 2 x sites in September and October 2024. Ongoing inclusion with the years' curriculum. Presentation to Taxi Driver Forum re: VAWG November 2024. Ongoing NTE duties at licensed premises and

<p>2.6 Promote safe travel by conducting campaigns</p>	<p>National seatbelt safety campaign event to be carried out.</p> <p>Social media to advertise the campaign</p>	<p>Police (Georgina Yeasley)</p>	<p>NPT Inspector Catherine Davies</p>	<p>Existing staff / resources</p>	<p>To raise awareness around drivers and passengers wearing seatbelts.</p>	<p>presentations during the winter months, leading up to Christmas/New year.</p> <p>Work with Pub Watch to re-promote VAWG</p> <p>Project Vigilant is being run in Stevenage High Street.</p>
						<p>Q4</p>
						<p>Q1</p>
						<p>Q2</p>
						<p>Q3 Joint working between SBC and Police around taxis and spotting CCE/VAWG, as well as educating the public about how to recognise properly licensed taxis</p>

						Q4
<p>5.7 Home Office Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy Boards 'local delivery principles' which seek to describe a consistent approach to understanding and addressing ASB in local communities</p>	<p>1. Victims should be encouraged to report ASB and expect to be taken seriously. They should have clear ways to report, have access to help and support to recover, and be given the opportunity to choose restorative approaches to tackling ASB.</p> <p>Victims and complainants are all ways taken seriously and encouraged to report any nuisance they witness. There are clear pathways to reporting ASB currently, but this can all ways be improved, we will therefore review this process. We have previously used Restorative Justice and media as a tool to resolving ASB. I do have an issue with using the word "victim" it implies that someone is a victim and although they may have experienced ASB or crime this doesn't necessarily make them a "victim" we prefer to use the name "complainant"</p> <p>2. Agencies will have clear and transparent processes to ensure that victims can report ASB concerns, can understand how the matter will be investigated and are kept well informed of progress once a report is made.</p> <p>Our policies and procedures are clear and transparent; an action plan is completed with the complainants so that they have a clear understanding of the process. The plan also asks how they would like to be contacted and how often. A risk assessment is also completed.</p> <p>3. Agencies and practitioners will work across boundaries to identify, assess and tackle ASB and its underlying causes. Referral pathways should be clearly set out between services and published locally. This includes pathways for the community trigger and health services.</p> <p>The ASB Officers, and Officers with Community Advice & Support have established excellent links with partners, referral pathways are clear and are essential for the running of the different</p>					

services within the team. Pathways for reporting ASB are set out on the website; this can also be accessed by telephone or in person.

4. The public's ASB concerns should always be considered both nationally and locally in strategic needs assessments for community safety. Best practice should be shared through a network of ASB experts within each community safety partnership, each policing area and nationally. For 2024/25 we want to introduce dip sampling of ASB cases and those specifically where there has been a partnership input so we can be sure of best practice and support for our customers

The strategic assessment is initially discussed with the Chief Inspector and the Community Advice & Support Manager; it is then shared with partners at JAG and once agreed shared with colleagues at SoSafe.

5. Adults and children who exhibit ASB should have the opportunity to take responsibility for their behaviour and repair the harm caused by it. Agencies should deliver appropriate interventions, which may include criminal justice options, based on the seriousness, risks and vulnerabilities of the case.

Both the community safety team and the wardens work closely with probation and their pay back scheme. The team can also offer restorative justice and mediation.

Partnership principles

The CSP has a set of guiding principles which can be applied to all of the partnership's projects, initiatives and operational work.

1. Partners share information in order to reduce and prevent crime.
2. Partnership resources are used intelligently.
3. Problems are better solved collectively.
4. Partners trust each other's expertise and integrity.
5. Strong leadership is guided by a set of overarching strategic priorities.
6. Operational strategy is based on the expected outcomes.
7. Evaluation is important, in order to encourage improvement.

8. Innovation and imagination enable change and growth.
9. Partners are willing to adapt and change in order to learn, develop, and improve.
10. Early intervention is usually a better solution than intervention.
11. Public engagement and good communications ensure Stevenage people receive consistent messages.

Abbreviations			
ASB	Anti-social behaviour	NhW	Neighbourhood Watch
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation	OWL	Online Watch Link
DA	Domestic Abuse	PCC	Police and Crime Commissioner
DHR	Domestic Homicide Review	PPO	Prolific, persistent offender
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation	RAG	Responsible Authorities Group
JAG	Joint Action Group	SADA	Survivors Against Domestic Abuse
HCC	Herts County Council	SAFS	Shared Anti-Fraud Service
HFRS	Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service	SBC	Stevenage Borough Council
HYH	Herts Young Homeless	SFCF	Stevenage Football Club Foundation
MAPPA	Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangement	SOC	Serious and Organised Crime
MARAC	Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference	WHBC	Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council



Community Safety Strategy 2024-2029

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) Form

[October 2024 - October 2028]

Date created	October 2024
Approved by	Cabinet
Owner	Sarah Pateman
Version	1
Author	Sarah Pateman
Business Unit and Team	Strategic Community Safety Community Advice and Support

Please [click this link](#) to find the EqIA guidance toolkit for support in completing the following form.

For translations, braille or large print versions of this document please email equalities@stevenage.gov.uk.

First things first:

Does this policy, project, service, or other decision need an EqlA?

Title:	Community Safety Strategy 2025-2028		
Please answer Yes or No to the following questions:			
Does it affect staff, service users or the wider community?			Yes
Has it been identified as being important to particular groups of people?			No
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?			No

Where a positive impact is likely, will this help to:	
Remove discrimination and harassment?	Yes
Promote equal opportunities?	Yes
Encourage good relations?	Yes

If you answered 'Yes' to one or more of the above questions you should carry out an EqlA.

Or 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 below and seek approval from your Assistant Director before confirming this by sending this page to equalities@stevenage.gov.uk.

I determine that no EqlA is needed to inform the decision on the .

Name of assessor:

Decision approved by:

Role:

Role: Assistant Director

Date:

Date:

Equality Impact Assessment Form

For a policy, project, strategy, staff or service change, or other decision that is new, changing or under review

What is being assessed?		Community Safety Strategy 2025-2028			
Lead Assessor	Sarah Pateman			Assessment team	Community Advice and Support
Start date	October 2024	End date	October 2028		
When will the EqIA be reviewed? (Typically every 2 years)	October 2026				

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Who may be affected by the proposed project?	All residents in Stevenage will benefit through agencies working effectively in partnership together.
What are the key aims of the proposed project?	<p>It is a statutory requirement that Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) produce a three-year crime reduction plan which is refreshed annually in the form of an action plan.</p> <p>The aim of the partnership plan is to identify how agencies will work together to tackle crime and disorder in Stevenage. The plan sets out the three-year priorities and the actions that will be taken to meet the priorities.</p> <p>The priorities were identified through a strategic assessment which analysed patterns and trends in crime over 2021/2024</p> <p>The outcome will be reduced levels of crime and disorder in Stevenage, achieved through a co-ordinated response from partners.</p>

What positive measures are in place (if any) to help fulfil our legislative duties to:					
Remove discrimination & harassment	SBC is a third party reporting centre for hate crime / discrimination and actively encouraging more organisations to sign up as third party reporting centres to reach the wider community.	Promote equal opportunities	The service priorities aim to promote equalities through partnership working to ensure that all Stevenage residents have equal opportunity access services.	Encourage good relations	Engagement with a wide range of residents, community safety partners and Services. Developing relationships with vulnerable groups through targeted outreach.

What sources of data / information are you using to inform your assessment?	<p>We have used data/information available both locally and nationally, assessments are up to-date.</p> <p>The strategic assessment highlighted particular groups of people that are affected by certain types of crime. This includes victims and perpetrators. This information can be used to identify trends that need to be targeted by the partnership.</p>
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In assessing the potential impact on people, are there any overall comments that you would like to make?	It has been identified that more widespread engagement with different groups within the community needs to take place. Engagement tends to happen most easily with people who have an issue to discuss, for example, those who attend the Street Meet events. Over the coming year we will be seeking ways of ensuring engagement is more widespread and covers those groups which are harder to reach.
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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:

Age

Positive impact	Positive impact	Yes	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>Younger people are often vulnerable to being involved in crime. Education and diversionary activities are carried out with these groups. Young offenders have specific services provided for them.</p> <p>Older people are often vulnerable to certain types of crime and can be more fearful than other age groups. Crime prevention advice and visits are provided. A lack of understanding between generations can lead to mistrust and anxiety. We aim to increase understanding between generations.</p>				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	Support is provided to those of all ages who may be at risk of criminal exploitation or vulnerable to being a victim.		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

Disability e.g., physical impairment, mental ill health, learning difficulties, long-standing illness

Positive impact	Positive impact	Yes	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>Those with disability support needs may be considered more vulnerable to becoming a victim of crime and less likely to report crime or access support.</p>				
What opportunities are there to promote	Specialist support is provided to those who may need it. Including raising awareness in		What do you still need to find out?	Further research needs to take place in relation to the services we can provide for	

equality and inclusion?	the community in relations to vulnerable disabled individuals being exploited in relation to fraud and cuckooing.	Include in actions (last page)	people who have a disability. Exploring what provisions are available for those with learning difficulties, deaf and deaf-blind.
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Gender Reassignment

Positive impact	Yes	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	Gender reassignment may make individuals more vulnerable to crime. Data shows that 80% of transgender individuals have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse in their lifetime. SoSafe partnership works with specialist domestic abuse services to ensure male and female victims of domestic violence are fully supported.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	Specialist support is provided to those to victims of violence against women and girls and domestic abuse, regardless of gender reassignment.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)			

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Marriage or Civil Partnership

Positive impact	None	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	Within the last year we have not had any service data to show that there would be any impact on this group. Staff do have an awareness of this particular group and as with any other groups will ensure that no group is disadvantaged.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

Pregnancy & Maternity

Positive impact	Positive Impact	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	The partnership notes that with some crimes, pregnancy and maternity may be a factor. Data shows that when a woman is in a domestic abuse relationship and she is pregnant/had a baby in the last 18 months, she is more likely to be assaulted.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	Specialist support is provided to those to victims of domestic abuse and the partnership will continue to raise awareness of domestic abuse.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)			

Race

Positive impact	Positive Impact	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	This strategy will be for all those living within Stevenage, including BME groups. Hate crime can be a problem for some ethnic groups and language can be a barrier to understanding the services provided.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	The partnership will continue to raise awareness of the support services available and the methods of accessing those services. It will also raise awareness that the council is a third-party reporting centre for hate crime and support those that are victims of hate crime.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)			

Religion or Belief

Positive impact	Positive Impact	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	The strategy is for all within Stevenage irrespective of religion or beliefs but the partnership notes that hate crime can be a problem for some religious/belief groups.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	The partnership will continue to raise awareness that the council is a third-party reporting centre for hate crime and support those that are victims of hate crime.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)			

Sex

Positive impact	Positive Impact	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	The partnership acknowledges that some crimes, like domestic abuse are more gendered. While data shows that the majority of victims are from women, the team are aware that men can also be at risk of domestic abuse and the same consideration should be given to them as well as women. SoSafe partnership works with specialist domestic abuse services to ensure male and female victims of domestic violence are fully supported, as well as victims of violence against women and girls.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	Continue to raise awareness about domestic abuse and what support services are available to victims.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)			

Sexual Orientation e.g., straight, lesbian / gay, bisexual

Positive impact	Positive Impact	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	The strategy will be for all communities within Stevenage irrespective of sexual orientation, but the partnership notes that hate crime can be a problem for the LGBTQ+ community.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	The partnership will continue to raise awareness that the council is a third-party reporting centre for hate crime and support those that are victims of hate crime.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)			

<p align="center">Socio-economic¹</p> <p align="center">e.g., low income, unemployed, homelessness, caring responsibilities, access to internet, public transport users, social value in procurement</p>					
Positive impact	Yes	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	Data reflects that individuals from lower socio-economic communities are more vulnerable to crime and are likely to be exposed from a young age, leading to those young people likely committing crime themselves.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	Support from services is available for free to those who need to access it.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)			

¹Although 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.

	Continue to work with schools to reach young people who may be considered deprived and exposed to crime to provide support and negate their likeliness of future criminal activity.		
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Consultation Findings

Document any feedback gained from the following groups of people:

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Staff?	Staff reported that working with partners is the key to problem solving and providing support the community.	Residents?	Residents are consulted with at various opportunities through service surveys. This allows us to adapt to resident needs and report back any trends to the partnership.
Voluntary & community sector?	Voluntary Sectors agree that in order to make a difference it is essential that we work co-operatively, and information is shared regularly.	Partners?	Partners agree that in order to make a difference it is essential that we work co-operatively, and information is shared regularly.
Other stakeholders?			

Overall Conclusion & Future Activity

Explain the overall findings of the assessment and reasons for outcome (please choose one) :		
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	As below
	2b. Continue as planned	
	2c. Stop and remove	

Detail the actions that are needed as a result of this assessment and how they will help to remove discrimination & harassment, promote equal opportunities and / or encourage good relations :				
Action	Will this help to remove, promote and / or encourage?	Responsible officer	Deadline	How will this be embedded as business as usual?
To engage more fully with the public in informing them of the work of the partnership and seeking their views on community safety issues.	This will promote the work of the SoSafe partnership and shaping the partnerships focus on what the community needs are.	SoSafe Partnership Partnership Services	October 2028	Will become part of the normal monitoring processes.
Further research needs to take place in relation to the services we can provide for people who have a disability. Exploring what provisions are available for those with learning difficulties, deaf and deaf-blind.	This will promote equal opportunities for all residents by ensuring everyone in the community can access the services they need to in a way that suits them.	SoSafe Partnership Partnership Services	October 2028	Will become part of the normal monitoring processes.

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Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director:

Date: October 2024

Please send this EqlA to equalities@stevenage.gov.uk for critical friend feedback and for final submittance with the associated project.

Meeting CABINET / COUNCIL
Portfolio Area Resources and Transformation
Date 12 February 2025/26 February 2025



FINAL CAPITAL STRATEGY 2024/25-2028/29

KEY DECISION

Authors Rhona Bellis
Contributors Gavin Allen / Reenu Keogh / Senior Leadership Team
Lead Officers Brian Moldon
Contact Officer Clare Fletcher

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To approve revisions to the 2024/25 General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme and Strategy and approve the Capital Programme for 2025/26.
- 1.2. To provide Members with an update on the Council's draft Five-Year Capital Strategy and the resources available to fund the Capital Strategy.
- 1.3. To provide Members with an update on the Council's investment strategy as required by the updated prudential code.
- 1.4. To set out the Council's approach to funding its key priorities.
- 1.5. To update Members on the work of the Council's Financial Security Group (CFSG) in reviewing all General Fund capital bids prior to inclusion in the final 2025/26 Capital Strategy to the February 2025 Cabinet.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the following proposals be recommended to Council on 26 February 2025:

- 2.1. Final General Fund Capital Budget for 2025/26 of £52Million, as set out in Appendix C to the report, be approved.
- 2.2. Revisions to the 2024/25 General Fund Capital Budget for 2024/25 of £244k, as set out in Appendix C to the report, be approved.

- 2.3. Final HRA Capital Budget for 2025/26 of £51.4Million, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be approved.
- 2.4. Forecast of resources and approach to resourcing the capital programme as outlined in the report (General fund Paragraph 4.4 and HRA paragraph 4.10) be approved.
- 2.5. Final General Fund growth bids identified for inclusion in the Capital Strategy (paragraph **Error! Reference source not found.**, and Appendix A to the report) be approved.
- 2.6. To enable the use of Community infrastructure levy of up to £5Million, to fund future infrastructure projects as outlined in paragraph 4.6.3. be approved.
- 2.7. The approved capital de-minimis expenditure limit of £10,000 be noted.
- 2.8. The approved revenue surplus in any year of up to £500K that can be allocated to the capital reserve to support capital expenditure be noted.
- 2.9. That the comments from Council Financial Security Group set out in section 4.14 are noted.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1. Introduction

- 3.1.1. This report is an update on the Council's Draft Capital Strategy 2024/25-2028/29 presented to the January 2025 Cabinet meeting. Changes since that meeting can be found in section 4.2.4.
- 3.1.2. The purpose of the Capital Strategy is to outline how the Council determines its priorities for capital investment and how much it can afford to borrow as well as setting out any associated risks. The Council's Financial Security Group (CFSG) and the Senior Leadership Team reviewed the capital bids for 2024/25 contained within the Capital Strategy in November /December 2024 and the results of that review are included in this report.
- 3.1.3. The framework the government uses to control how much councils can afford to spend on capital investment is known as the Prudential Framework. The objectives of the Prudential Code, which sets out how this framework is to be applied, are to ensure that local authorities' capital investment plans are:
 - affordable, prudent, and sustainable and that:
 - treasury management decisions are taken in accordance with good professional practice;
 - local strategic planning, asset management planning and proper option appraisal are supported.
- 3.1.4. The Government issued guidance on the disclosures required in the Capital Strategy from 1 April 2018 onwards which includes:
 - an Investment Strategy;
 - disclosure of other investments and their contribution to service delivery objectives and/or place making role;
 - indicators that allow Members and the public to assess a local authority's total risk exposure as a result of investment decisions, including how these

investments have been funded, rate of return and additional debt servicing costs taken on;

- the approach to assessing the risk of losses being made before entering and whilst holding an investment; and
- the steps taken to ensure that elected Members and Statutory officers have the appropriate skills and governance.

3.1.5. Some of these disclosures may be outlined in the Treasury Management Strategy instead of the Capital Strategy.

3.2 General Fund Investment Strategy

3.2.1 For a number of years capital spend has been prioritised due to the limited availability of capital receipts and the Council's ability to afford borrowing costs. Accordingly, the council applied a 'fix on fail' approach to assets with no significant asset improvements being funded, with the exception of those supported through external funding or partially through external funding (for example Garage Improvement Programme). This approach cannot be sustained in the medium to long term as it will lead to a gradual degradation of the Council's assets with reactive works only being undertaken to keep sites wind and water tight. Sustaining such an approach in the medium term will inevitably lead to close of buildings even before consideration is given to the legal requirements in terms of Energy Performance Certificate (EPC's) and other legal and climate change requirements.

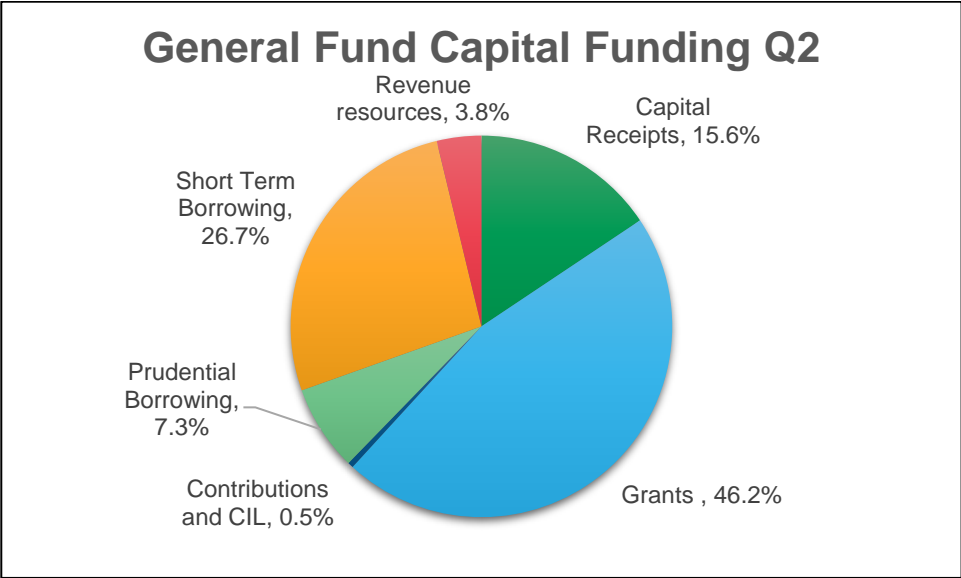
3.2.2 To address the issues above, The General Fund Capital Strategy Overview - Priorities versus Funding Requirement 2023/24-2029/30 report to Executive 15 November 2023 set out the Councils key capital regeneration and community asset ambitions and key land and asset disposals, to determine a funding strategy to meet corporate objectives and address the issues outlined above.

3.2.3 The following priority schemes / activities require a funding strategy:

- Regeneration SG1- Public Sector Hub, Leisure Centre and Theatre
- Climate Change - green fleet, buildings (operational, community and commercial)
- Towns fund programme where match funding is required
- Operational need investment in Community Assets
- Response to Legislative changes e.g. waste and recycling
- Protection of key income streams to ensure the financial resilience of the General Fund

3.2.4 The high level assessment in the report of potential value of capital receipts that could be realised by SBC is £44Million which is significantly less than the need identified of £127Million. This means that even if all approved receipts were delivered there will still be a requirement to find alternative funding strategies or third-party funding to meet the gap. The total high level investment requirement and total receipt realisation are currently excluded from the Capital Strategy but will come forward in future reiterations of the programme.

- 3.2.5 The limited funding available compared to the identified current need means that in the main priority schemes will need to provide a significant element of self-funding through providing land development opportunities.
- 3.2.6 The current years capital programme (approved February 2024 and as subsequently amended through the quarterly monitoring and supplementary reports), is fully funded, and shown in the chart below which reflects the quarter two monitoring report to the November 2024 Cabinet.



- 3.2.7 Grants includes £27.5Million Towns Fund Grant from an overall allocation of £37.5Million which is fully allocated to specific regeneration projects. Funding is received in stages as relevant projects proceed.
- 3.2.8 Short term borrowing is used to bridge funding gaps and is generally “repaid” from capital receipts in the following years.
- 3.2.9 Prudential Borrowing remains an option to fund capital schemes. Due to the on-going net cost to the General Fund, any such proposal requires a business case to be completed to determine affordability and benefit to the Council. This approach may be used to fund income generating schemes which support the Councils Priorities.

3.3 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Investment Strategy

- 3.3.1 The HRA is a legally ring-fenced account and the HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), approved by Cabinet on 13 November 2024, covers both revenue and capital expenditure as they are intrinsically linked – capital investment supporting the provision of services over the course of the plan. Further details can be found in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Final Budget and Rent Setting 2025/26 (Cabinet 15 January 2025 / Council 22 January 2025).
- 3.3.2 Funding for HRA capital projects comes from a variety of sources and preference is given to using restricted or third part funding ahead of more flexible funding, to ensure that funding conditions are met and optimised. These include right to buy receipts, S20 receipts, grants and developer contributions.

3.4 Budget and Policy Framework

3.4.1 The process for approving capital budgets is set out in the Budget and Policy Framework in the Constitution. This includes a consultation period and the timescale required to implement this is outlined below:

Table 1		
Date	Meeting	Report
Jan-25	Cabinet	Draft 2024/25 - 2028/29 Capital Strategy (GF and HRA)
	Overview and Scrutiny	Draft 2024/25 - 2028/29 Capital Strategy (GF and HRA)
Feb-25	Cabinet	Final 2024/25 – 2028/29 Capital Strategy (GF and HRA)
	Overview and Scrutiny	Final 2024/25 – 2028/29 Capital Strategy (GF and HRA)
Feb-25	Special Council	Final 2024/25 – 2028/29 Capital Strategy (GF and HRA)

3.4.2 This is the second time the Capital Strategy 2024/25-2028/29 has been considered by Cabinet and Scrutiny.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 Capital Programme – General Fund

4.1.1. The ongoing financial pressures as set out section 3 of this report resulted in only the most urgent bids or those supporting the delivery of a top priority being included in the list of capital growth for consideration by members.

4.1.2. Budgets in the Capital Strategy are reviewed quarterly to ensure that they remain relevant and deliverable. There have been no significant changes to the phasing of the existing Capital Strategy presented to members at Q2 (November 2024).

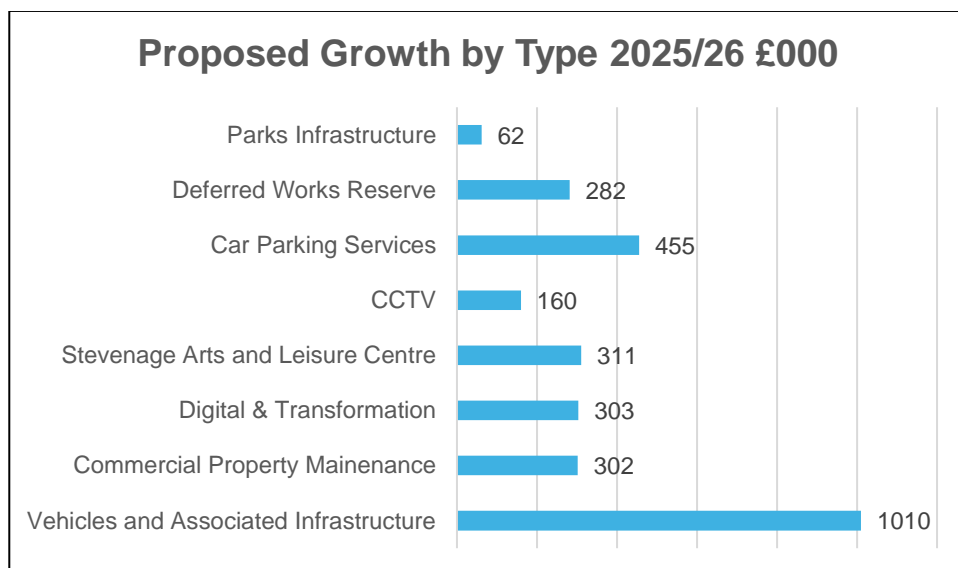
4.2. Proposed Capital Bids 2025/26

4.2.1. The capital growth bids received and recommended for inclusion in the Capital Strategy by Council’s Financial Security Group (CFSG) and the Council’s Senior Leadership (SLT) have been prioritised, as set out in the table below (details in Appendix A). These bids total £2.6Million for 2025/26. Additional bids for future years will be considered as part of the 2026/27 budget setting process.

Table 2 Proposed General Fund Growth 2025/26		
		£000
Priority 2	Income generating	10
Priority 3	Mandatory requirements (including Health & Safety)	449

Table 2 Proposed General Fund Growth 2025/26		
		£000
Priority 4	Schemes to maintain operational efficiency	2,131
Priority 8	Schemes that further the Council's Corporate Plans	12
	Deferred Works reserve	282
Total General Fund Capital Growth Bids		2,884
Funding Proposal		
General Capital Receipts		1,406
Locality Review Receipts		854
Forum Receipts to Fund Proposed Growth Items		455
Capital Reserve		169
Total Funding Proposed		2,884

- 4.2.2. Total funding identified for future years capital growth amounted to £2.884Million. The proposed bids for consideration above amount to £2.602Million. Members are asked to approve an increase in the deferred works reserve budget in 2025/26 of £282K reflecting this excess funding, to add capacity to the capital program in case any deferred bids become urgent.
- 4.2.3. The proposed growth can be split into service areas as illustrated in the graph below.



4.2.4. Changes since the Draft Capital Strategy Report

- 4.2.4.1. Since the Draft Capital Strategy Report went to Cabinet 15 January 2025, the following budgets have been added to the Final Capital Strategy. These have previously been to members to agree in principal.

- 4.2.4.2. There are a number of significant growth projects that directly contribute to the headline priorities of the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan. They represent the council's strategic ambitions across key delivery areas and are tied into the strategic milestones of the 2024/25 Corporate Performance Suite. The below projects represent significant capital expenditure, across several key areas including: Balancing the Budget and Building New & Sustainable Homes:
- 4.2.4.3. Garages improvements budget £7Million – this budget is to enable to the delivery of the Garages Asset Management Strategy and is linked into the council's ambitious Commercialisation programme which is a key component of the Balancing the Budget pillar of the Corporate Plan. This includes ongoing (£250K per annum for 10 years) and one-off garages capital works (£4.5Million) to be delivered over seven to ten years from 2025/26. Funding will come from existing budgets £150K, freeholder contributions £150K, garage sales £2.25Million, revenue contributions £617K and the balance from prudential borrowing. Full details can be found in the Garages Asset Management Report (Cabinet 15 January 2025).
- 4.2.4.4. Indoor Market space reconfiguration £4.1Million - the Council has consulted on moving the indoor market to Park Place and the re-letting the existing space. The works are estimated to cost a total of £4.1Million, funded by £2Million of town fund grant, agreed by Stevenage Development Board and a further £2.1Million of prudential borrowing to be funded from rental income once a tenant is secured, expenditure will be incurred once the tenant is contracted (Cabinet June 2024).
- 4.2.4.5. Park Place fit out £1.7Million - capital costs relating to the fitting out of accommodation at Park Place in Stevenage where the indoor market will be relocated are currently being negotiated. The most recent estimate is between £1.6Million and £1.7Million including costs relating to the safe management of food within the space. Spend is expected to fall into 2024/25 and 2025/26. Funding will come from Towns Fund - £600K, Capital Receipts £378K, deferred works reserve £450k and ring fenced capital receipts ~ £250k (Cabinet June 2024). The capital programme will be updated to reflect this once approved.
- 4.2.4.6. Ongoing discussions have been taking place with Homes England regarding grant funding for the new community infrastructure at The Oval redevelopment. . The Oval scheme is a key delivery element of the Building New & Sustainable Homes priority area, with the grant funding also contributing to the council's Thriving Neighbourhoods ambitions.
- 4.2.4.7. In January 2025, Homes England confirmed that this was being recommended for approval. A final decision on funding is expected in February 2025, with the current proposal being that the £9Million provision made within the GF capital budget to complete these works being fully funded by Homes England grant. A subsequent report will be taken to Cabinet following the outcome of the grant request to appoint contractors to make any required amendments to the budget and any appointments to deliver the works at the site. Any funding allocation would be time limited with spend needing to be completed by March 2026. Members are asked to approve the addition of £9Million to the capital programme in 2024/25 for this fully funded grant funded project.
- 4.2.4.8. The Oval redevelopment will see significant change at the largest retail setting outside of the main town centre facilities. Following extensive consultation with over 7,000 responses to surveys, Planning permission for the new scheme was

granted in July 2024. The new development will see the delivery of a new community centre and church, as well as the introduction of new play facilities which will better meet the needs of the existing community. There will also be the construction of new retail including the provision of an anchor retail store which will further encourage footfall at the site. Alongside this, the proposals will see the construction of 300 new homes, including the delivery of 91 new independent living accommodation in the first phase of delivery which will be located on the former Hobbs Court site.

4.2.4.9. Revised drawdown forecasts received from MACE have been applied to re-phase the SG1 joint venture costs across 2024/25 to 2026/27 resulting in re-phase of £1.2Million of budget from 2024/25 into 2025/26.

4.2.4.10. Re-phasing of £2.5Million from 2025/26 to 2026/27 in relation to housing investment delivered through the wholly owned housing development company as options are reviewed by officers. These will come forward at a future date.

4.2.4.11. These items add an additional £17.1Million to the Capital programme - in 2024/25 £(244)K, 2025/26 £14.7Million and 2026/27 £2.6Million.

4.3. Revised Summary Capital Programme including Proposed Growth

4.3.1. The revised Capital Strategy for 2024/25 - 2026/27 totals £82.6Million which includes the proposed growth bids of £2.9Million and those projects identified in section 4.2.4. This is summarised by service in the table below, and in detail in Appendix C.

Table 3: Revised Capital Programme including proposed growth by Service

	24/25 £000	25/26 £000	26/27 £000	Total £000
Stevenage Direct Services	4,917	6,354	250	11,521
Housing Development	1,939	16,203	2,874	21,016
Finance and Estates	2,737	557	0	3,294
Digital & Transformation	379	303	0	682
Regeneration	13,869	27,077	1,336	42,282
Communities and Neighbourhoods	1,095	492	0	1,587
Planning and Regulatory	953	553	0	1,506
Deferred Works Reserve	387	282	0	669
Total GF Schemes	26,276	51,821	4,460	82,557
Garage Improvement Plan (GIP) £250,000 budget annually from 2027/28-2034/35 – Total £2Million				

- 4.3.2. Excluding the GIP, there are no other current capital projects phased for delivery after March 2027. Capital investment will be required over the medium to long term to support service delivery and a review of the high level investment need, will be refreshed in a future capital update. These bids come forward annually for consideration (e.g., Fleet replacement). The funding of the medium to long term capital strategy is considered in the section 3.2.
- 4.3.3. The Deferred Works Reserve, after the inclusion of growth above, will have a budget of £387K in 2024/25 and a further £282K in 2025/26 giving a total of £669K. This budget is for any health & safety emergency works that may arise after the budgets are agreed at Council in February.
- 4.4. Capital Resources for the Revised General Fund Capital Strategy, including proposed Growth**
- 4.4.1. The projected resources used to fund the Capital Strategy are summarised in the table below.

Table 4: Revised Capital Programme Resourcing including Proposed Growth

	24/25 £'000	25/26 £'000	26/27 £'000	Total £'000	Total %
Capital Receipts including Locality Review Receipts	8,037	3,676	674	12,387	15%
Grants and other contributions	9,138	27,957	1,336	38,431	47%
Revenue Reserves	550	617	0	1,167	1%
Capital Reserve	496	569	0	1,065	1%

Table 4: Revised Capital Programme Resourcing including Proposed Growth

	24/25 £'000	25/26 £'000	26/27 £'000	Total £'000	Total %
CIL	208	98	0	306	<1%
Forum Receipts	378	455	0	833	1%
New Homes Bonus CNM	243	0	0	243	<1%
Borrowing	7,226	18,449	2,450	28,125	34%
TOTAL	26,276	51,821	4,460	82,557	100%
Garage Improvement Plan (GIP) £250,000 budget annually from 2027/28-2034/2035 – Total £2Million to be funded from future Garage Sales.					

4.4.2. The total borrowing recommended of £28Million includes £19.8Million of short term borrowing for SG1 Joint Venture and Housing Development schemes which is scheduled to be repaid in 2026/27 and 2027/28, using capital receipts profiled to be received in that year. The remaining balance is prudential borrowing for Garage Improvements and Housing Development schemes including through the Wholly Owned Company (WOC). The borrowing is repaid through a minimum revenue contribution (MRP) from the General Fund (see also section 4.7).

4.4.3. The use of capital receipts is dependent on delivery of the disposal sites to the market. The forecast below includes both General Capital Receipts and Locality Review Receipts as they are available for use in the Capital Programme. Ring-fenced Town Centre Transformation and SG1 receipts are restricted.

4.5. Capital Receipts Review Update

4.5.1. The current position is detailed below and shows an overall reduction in forecast receipts up to 2026/27 of £216K. This is a site previously due to be sold, now being held for strategic review. The current and future economic climate impacts on asset sales. Forecasts are based on best information available at the time the report is written.

Table 5: Capital Receipts	Previous Forecast, £000	Revised Forecast/Actual, £000	Variance, £000
Capital Receipts (exclude Locality)			
Year 2024/25 Forecast	6,976	7,060	84
Year 2025/26 Forecast	1,450	1,450	0
Year 2026/27 Forecast	12,240	12,240	0
Total Capital Receipts (exclude Locality)	20,666	20,750	84
Locality Receipts			
Year 2024/25 Forecast	1,215	915	(300)
Year 2025/26 Forecast	245	245	0
Total Locality Receipts total	1,460	1,160	(300)

Table 5: Capital Receipts	Previous Forecast, £000	Revised Forecast/Actual, £000	Variance, £000
Grant Total Capital Receipts	22,126	21,910	(216)
Sales Costs 4%	(624)	(612)	12
Contingency adjustment	(725)	(745)	0
Total Net Receipts	20,777	20,553	(224)

4.6. Community Infrastructure and S106 Update

- 4.6.1. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a planning charge introduced by the Planning Act 2008. The Council started charging CIL in April 2020 and the current unallocated balance is £2.955Million including £0.89Million for local projects and £2.065Million for strategic council priorities. Local CIL of £97.5K per annum for three years from 2023/24 to 2025/26 has been allocated to fund the Community Climate Change budget. This is a member led strategy and wards can use £7.5K per ward per annum to fund relevant projects.
- 4.6.2. Public consultation on changes to the charging mechanism for CIL was reported to Cabinet January 2025.
- 4.6.3. Strategic CIL can be used to fund town centre infrastructure projects including those identified above. Members are asked to approve the allocation of up to £5Million of CIL to the Council's top priorities as set out in the The General Fund Capital Strategy Overview - Priorities versus Funding Requirement 2023/24-2029/30 report to Executive 15 November 2023. For: firstly, the sports and leisure hub and secondly, (if applicable) the public sector hub.
- 4.6.4. Others allocation of funds to relevant capital projects may be brought forward for approval later in the year- and require Cabinet approval above £75K.
- 4.6.5. Section 106 (S106) monies that have yet to be allocated to any current or future capital schemes are shown in the table below along with the categories they can be used for:

Table 6: S106 contribution Available	Amount £000
Biodiversity	94
Environmental	131
Engineering and Stevenage Works	68
Total	293

4.7. Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)

- 4.7.1. MRP is applied where the council has to set aside a revenue allocation for provision of debt repayments (borrowing in the capital programme). MRP replaces other capital charges (e.g., depreciation) in the statement of accounts and has an impact on the council's bottom line. MRP will increase and decrease throughout the programme and is sensitive to both expenditure and funding changes. The council will continue to balance the use of capital receipts, internal borrowing and

external borrowing to ensure the most efficient use of resources, including the need to fund MRP.

4.7.2. The other main risks to the capital programme are:

- Potential for scheme overspends.
- Potential for delay in realising capital receipts noting that £9.7Million of land/asset sales are forecast to be achieved in 2024/25 and 2025/26.
- The deferred works budget may not be sufficient to fund any schemes not currently funded in the Strategy due to the ongoing and aforementioned fix-on-fail policy approach.
- Potential for money spent as capital on Towns Fund projects to revert to a future revenue liability if projects do not progress to physical completion, e.g., only feasibility and early design are completed.
- Cost volatility and increased client risk in construction projects due to the impact of cost of living, which has resulted in supply chain pressures and significant price increases across the construction sector.

4.8. Other capital investment and Finance Lease

4.8.1. The Council purchased several properties in the town centre to enable it to meet its SG1 regeneration aims. These properties were purchased in part using LEP funding. These properties have been purchased for regeneration purposes and therefore do not fall under the Property Investment Strategy. Prior to making these strategic acquisitions full risk assessments were undertaken to ensure the cost of carrying these assets in the short to medium term could be met by the Council. The Regeneration Asset allocated reserve has been setup specifically to cover these costs.

4.8.2. The Council undertook a long-term finance lease for a circa £50Million mixed development scheme on Queensway in the town centre. This is a finance lease arrangement and falls outside the scope of capital investment. Prior to the decision to proceed being made a risk assessment was undertaken and presented to Members. Key Officers were given training on their roles and responsibilities for the new governance arrangements associated with the Limited Liability Partnership.

4.8.3. External legal, financial, and commercial advice is procured to ensure the validity and viability of business cases presented to Members.

4.9. Capital Programme - Housing Revenue Account

4.9.1. The 2024/25 HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy (including capital programme) was approved by Cabinet on 13 November 2024.

4.9.2. The new plan allows for total investment of £249Million (down from £262Million) from 2023/24 to 2028/29, with the majority of this invested in existing (54%) and new housing stock (46%). It is important that the Council continues to balance ongoing investment with the need to replace RTB sales, in order meet housing demand and ensure the financial stability of the HRA in the longer term.

4.9.3. Building on the MTFs, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Final Budget and Rent Setting 2025/26 was approved by Council 22 January 2025. The values below are taken from that report.

- 4.9.4. The summary final capital strategy budget for 2024/25 – 2028/29 totals £212Million and is set out in full in Appendix B (HRA Capital Strategy).

Table 7: Summary HRA Capital Strategy						
	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Housing Investment	24,431	23,424	19,993	21,519	21,543	110,911
Special Projects & Equipment	36	0	0	0	0	36
New Build (Housing Development)	6,906	27,781	37,057	18,771	8,400	98,915
Digital & Transformation	289	194	199	740	764	2,186
Total HRA Schemes	31,662	51,399	57,249	41,030	30,707	212,048

4.10. Capital Programme – HRA Resources

- 4.10.1. Capital works on the housing stock is projected to be in line with the current year budget and the projected spend on new schemes is in line with the development programme included in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
- 4.10.2. Significant revenue pressures in the HRA may result in changes to the HRA business plan being brought to Cabinet for approval in 2025/26. Changes relating to capital funding will be reflecting in the strategy once approved.
- 4.10.3. The table below shows the funding sources for the programme. Most of the work to existing homes continues to be financed from the Major Repairs Reserve (MRR) (funded from depreciation charges to the HRA) and the new build costs from loans and receipts.

Table 8: Revised HRA Capital Programme						
	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
MRR (Self Financing Depreciation)	18,671	13,138	13,532	13,938	14,356	73,636
(RTB) new Build provision	5,760	9,678	3,854	3,983	4,115	27,389
Debt Provision Receipts	429	1,464	1,051	1,077	1,104	5,125
Section 20 Contribution	1,226	2,963	3,262	1,173	805	9,429
Other Receipts	0	1,375	0	0	0	1,375
Grant	1,410	8,446	1,200	4,140	1,000	16,196
Revenue Contribution to Capital	4,167	0	3,390	4,439	0	11,996
Borrowing	0	14,335	30,960	12,280	9,327	66,902
TOTAL	31,662	51,399	57,249	41,030	30,707	212,048

4.11. Changes to Right to Buy Capital Receipts

- 4.11.1. On the 30 October, the Chancellor of the Exchequer delivered an Autumn Budget Statement containing changes and measures that will impact the HRA and the

forecasts made in this MTFS report. The Government stated before the budget announcement that they intended to reduce the council homes sold under the scheme and they would be looking at discount levels to help achieve this reduction. They also confirmed that councils will no longer be required to return a proportion of the capital receipt generated by a RTB sale to HM Treasury. Nationally this totalled £183Million a year and will increase capital receipts over the MTFS by £3.5Million.

- 4.11.2. The impact on General Fund capital receipts relating to Right to Buy retained receipts is yet to be fully determined.
- 4.11.3. In 2023/24, 20 properties were sold through Right to Buy and so far this year 16 properties have been sold from 180 applications received of which 123 were received after the November 2024 budget. Historically between 30% and 50% of applications do not proceed to sale.
- 4.11.4. More detail on this and further impacts relating to the Autumn budget can be found in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Final Budget and Rent Setting 2025/26 report (Council January 2025)

4.12. De Minimis Level for Capital Expenditure 2025/26

- 4.12.1. Accounting best practice recommends that the Council approves a de minimis level for capital expenditure, or a value below which the expenditure would not be treated as capital. This would mean that the expenditure would not be recorded on the asset register nor be funded from capital resources.
- 4.12.2. No change to the de-minimis expenditure limit of £10,000 per scheme is being proposed this year.

4.13. Contingency Allowance for 2024/25

- 4.13.1. The contingency allowance for 2024/25 is £250,000. The contingency proposed for 2025/26 remains at £250,000, for schemes requiring funding from existing capital resources. A limit of £250,000 is also set for schemes for each Fund that have new resources or match funded resources identified in addition to those contained within this report. This limit applies individually to both the General Fund and the HRA. This contingency sum constitutes an upper limit on both funds within which the Cabinet can approve supplementary estimates, rather than forming part of the Council's Budget Requirement for the year.
- 4.13.2. The contingency allowance for 2024/25 is £500,000 in relation to spend of restricted use or 1.4.1 receipts for registered providers to ensure that the Council achieves nominal rights and does not have to return 1.4.1 receipts to the government. This contingency allowance is a recommended to remain at £500,000 for 2025/26.
- 4.13.3. Separate to the contingency allowance, is the delegation to Cabinet or Portfolio Lead/Leader of the Council to approve increases to the capital programme for grant funded projects, when external funding sources have been secured. Officers propose that this contingency allowance remains at £5Million where a scheme is fully funded from third party contribution/grant.

4.14. Consultation

Council Financial Security Group (CFSG) 19 November 2024

- 4.14.1. Following a review of all growth bids by Senior Leadership Team (SLT), a priority list was presented to CFSG with 24 new Growth Bids for 2025/26 (these are shown in Appendix A). The scoring rationale applied to these budgets was “do not support” 0 point, “support but low priority” 1 point and support with high priority” 3 points.
- 4.14.2. There were six members who were asked to score, with schemes receiving a mixed score between 7 and (the maximum) 18. The table below shows the summary of scores received.

Table 9: Scheme receiving:	Number of schemes
18 points (or 100%)	9
16 points (or 89%)	9
15 points (or 83%)	1
14 points (or 78%)	1
12 points (or 67%)	2
11 points (or 61%)	1
7 points (or 39%)	1

- 4.14.3. As can be seen from the table above, all but one scheme was supported by a majority of members scoring. The lowest scoring scheme, receiving 7 points was £140,000 for Car Parks Resurfacing (39% reflects the scoring aggregate, 4 out of 6 voted in favour but at low priority).
- 4.14.4. Car Parks resurfacing is being recommended as a bid to members for approval as it is part of an ongoing requirement to ensure the public remains safe when using the car parks.
- 4.14.5. Cabinet is requested to consider the views of CFSG and agree to approve all 24 schemes (which SLT had supported). These have all been included within the proposed capital programme for 2025/26 (in Appendix B) and are fully funded.

5. IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Financial Implications

- 5.1.1. This report is financial in nature and consequently financial implications are included in the above.

5.2. Legal Implications

- 5.2.1. The legal implications for each individual scheme within the capital programme will be considered when approval is sought for that scheme. Each scheme within the capital programme will be approved in accordance with the council’s constitution.

5.3. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 5.3.1. None specifically in relation to this report.

5.4. Risk Implications

- 5.4.1. The significant risks associated with the capital strategy are inherent within this report.
- 5.4.2. There is a risk that the value of land sales is not realised due to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis reducing demand and prices lower than anticipated as a result. In order to mitigate the impact of this, revenue underspends of up to £500k may be made available to support capital resource in the short term.
- 5.4.3. The Council manages this risk by reviewing and updating the Strategy quarterly, including resources where a sale is likely to complete. This will enable action to be taken where a receipt looks doubtful.
- 5.4.4. A significant risk exists that delivery of projects is works deferred due to lack of resources (including officers) and materials. A reasonable assessment has been made in the prioritisation process to try to keep this risk to a minimum. This relates in particular to property and regeneration projects where re-phasing of budgets is not uncommon and expenditure may fall into years after the current forecasts in this report.
- 5.4.5. The impact on the Council's medium - long term capital strategy as a result of the governments English Devolution White Paper (16 December 2024) is currently unknown. Measures include plans for new powers for mayors across strategic planning – giving them the ability to guide infrastructure and development projects across areas, housing, transport and skills. Impacts if any, will be included in future years capital strategy documents.

5.5. Climate Change Implications

- 5.5.1. In their current form the Council's buildings do not currently support the climate change ambitions in terms of energy efficiency or divestment of use of fossil fuels.
- 5.5.2. However, there is an opportunity through the local asset review programme to build in design principles to improved / future assets in terms of energy efficiency and sustainable energy sources. This should be a core principle of any future designs arising from the local asset reviews. There would be a further benefit of reduced energy costs.
- 5.5.3. The climate change agenda is far wider than the buildings the Council uses. For example, the Council is also examining the vehicle fleet and consideration will be given to reducing its carbon impact and the HRA strategy includes significant investment in decarbonisation for the period to 2028/29 – ensuring all homes meet the minimum EPC rating of C.
- 5.5.4. In addition to existing assts, new buildings being planned as part of the regeneration of Stevenage – e.g., the Hub and new Leisure Centre will be designed and equipped to meet modern standards.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

BD1 Quarter 2 monitoring report (Cabinet, December 2024)

BD2 HRA MTFS (2024/25-2028/29) (November 2024 Cabinet)

BD3 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) – Final Budget and Rent Setting 2025/26 (Cabinet 15 January 2025 / Council 22 January 2025)

BD4 General Fund Capital Strategy Overview – Priorities Versus Funding Requirement 2023/24-2029/30 (November 2023 Executive)

Appendices

- A - General Fund Capital Growth Bids
- B - HRA Capital Strategy
- C - General Fund Capital Strategy

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
GF CAPITAL - PRIORITY BASED BUDGETING 2025/26 CAPITAL GROWTH BIDS

Ref No	Service	Priority	Description of Growth Proposal	Capital in 2025/26	Description
1	Estates	3	Daneshill House boilers	197,000	3 x boiler replacement. 1 boiler out of service, 1 works but temperamental. All manufactured 2002 - 2005 with multiple obsolete parts.
2	Estates	4	Fry Road Nursery	80,000	Current building has suffered from subsidence. EPC upgrade works to meet legislation.
3	Estates	3	All buildings across corporate estate	25,000	Fire door survey and remedial works carried out across the corporate estate, to meet fire door standards
	Total Estates			302,000	
4	Planning & Regulatory	4	MSCP Lift Reinstatement	200,000	Additional lift in north east corner of St Georges to facilitate use by Autolus and accommodate increasing future demand
5	Planning & Regulatory	4	Car Parks Resurfacing	140,000	Replace running surfaces on MSCPs and bitmac resurfacing of surface car parks to maintain safety
6	Planning & Regulatory	4	Car Parks - Lighting Phased Replacement (2 years)	40,000	To provide for replacement of old lighting units with more efficient LED units
7	Planning & Regulatory	4	MSCP Painting	40,000	Painting of walls and ceilings to provide a brighter fresher experience for customers.
8	Planning & Regulatory	3	MSCP Fire Alarm Upgrade	25,000	Update St Georges Fire alarm and extend sensors to EV bays in line with insurance recommendations
9	Planning & Regulatory	2	Parking Restrictions	10,000	To allow for introduction of potential parking permit areas in Ingleside Drive and Bedwell
	Total Planning & Regulatory			455,000	
10	ICT	4	Stevenage Only - Idox Re-Tender	100,000	Stevenage Only - Idox Re-Tender
11	ICT	4	Telephony Hardware Refresh	75,638	New Telephony system as current one is end of life
12	ICT	4	Laptop Replacement Program	61,950	Laptop Replacement Program will replace laptops older than five years old and have reached their end-of-life.
13	ICT	4	Dell Memory (RAM) for Virtual desktop environment	31,860	End of life upgrading
14	ICT	4	Infrastructure & Hardware upgrades	20,650	Monitor replacement program, Azure cloud, Modern.gov migration.
15	ICT	4	Tablets Replacement Program	13,275	Tablet Replacement Program will replace tablets older than five years old and have reached their end-of-life.
	Total ICT			303,373	
16	SDS and Leisure	4	Operational Vehicles	962,704	Scheduled replacement programme to ensure the fleet is operational.
17	SDS and Leisure	4	CCTV Upgrade (Partnership)	159,900	Veracity Viewscope Command operating system used by the CCTV control room. Necessary for continued operation.
18	SDS and Leisure	3	Lighting Rig and Infrastructure	135,000	Theatre lighting system. Current lighting system over 15 years old and currently failing on a regular basis and causing a potential risk to shows. Replacement system is needed to allow the theatre to continue to attract productions
19	SDS and Leisure	4	Operational Plant	105,000	Scheduled replacement programme to ensure the plant is operational.
20	SDS and Leisure	4	House lights GCT	70,510	Current house lights. Significant energy consumption associated. Also, spare bulbs used up and we will no longer be able to replace blown bulbs.
21	SDS and Leisure	3	Parks Infrastructure (roads, footpaths etc.)	50,000	Keep access routes in a sound and safe condition, in order to avoid insurance claims, and measures to protect green spaces from unauthorised vehicular access.
22	SDS and Leisure	4	Fuel pumps at Cavendish Road fuel station.	30,000	3 x Fuel pumps nearing end of their service lives. Maximum service life of 15-20 years. Fuel pumps are 18 years old.
23	SDS and Leisure	3	Replacement work Cavendish Road fuel station - manhole covers	17,000	3 x manhole covers leading to the fuel tanks at end of their lives - supporting frames are cracking and require replacement.
24	SDS and Leisure	8	New pumps/aerators to FVP lakes	12,000	Current pumps/aerators are at the end of their economic life and require replacement in order to help maintain a healthy, attractive water system
	Total SDS and Leisure			1,542,114	
	Total New Capital Projects Consulted (CFSG)		Capital Growth considered by CFSG	2,602,487	
	Finance		DeferredWorks Reserve	282,000	Balance of funding identified for growth allocated to increase risk capacity in 2025/26
			Total New Capital Growth Bids	2,884,487	

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APPENDIX B - HOUSING CAPITAL STRATEGY



		2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/2028	2028/2029
Cost Centre	Scheme	Final Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy
		£	£	£	£	£
	SUMMARY					
	Capital Programme Excl New Build (Housing Investment)	24,431,083	23,424,077	19,993,134	21,519,212	21,543,326
	Special Projects & Equipment	36,073				
	New Build (Housing Development)	6,906,344	27,781,117	37,057,000	18,770,580	8,400,000
	Digital & Transformation	288,936	194,000	199,000	740,000	764,000
	TOTAL HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME	31,662,436	51,399,194	57,249,134	41,029,792	30,707,326
	HRA USE OF RESOURCES					
BH930	MRR (Self Financing Depreciation)	18,670,830	13,138,173	13,532,319	13,938,288	14,356,438
BH902	Other Capital Receipts	-	1,375,000	-	-	-
BH906	Section 20 Contribution (leaseholders income)	1,226,056	2,962,878	3,261,738	1,173,177	805,409
BH901	(RTB) new Build provision	5,759,869	9,677,658	3,854,421	3,982,876	4,114,542
BH903	RTB - Debt Provision Receipts	428,523	1,464,120	1,050,506	1,076,769	1,103,688
	Borrowing Prudential	-	14,335,365	30,959,784	12,280,024	9,327,249
	Direct Revenue Financing (was RCCO)	4,167,218	-	3,390,366	4,438,658	-
BH905	Grant	1,409,940	8,446,000	1,200,000	4,140,000	1,000,000
	TOTAL HRA RESOURCES FOR CAPITAL	31,662,436	51,399,194	57,249,134	41,029,792	30,707,326
	Major Repair Reserve Bought Forward (BH930)	(5,915,321)	1	(0)	(1)	(1)
	Depreciation (increasing MRR)	(12,755,509)	(13,138,174)	(13,532,319)	(13,938,289)	(14,356,438)
	MRR Used (decreasing MRR)	18,670,830	13,138,173	13,532,319	13,938,288	14,356,438
	Major Repair Reserve Carried Forward	1	(0)	(1)	(1)	(1)
BH901	Total RTB Receipts Bought Forward	(7,878,356)	(3,819,684)	(1)	(1)	(0)
	Total RTB Receipts Received	(1,701,197)	(5,857,975)	(3,854,421)	(3,982,876)	(4,114,542)
	Total RTB Receipts Used HRA	5,759,869	9,677,658	3,854,421	3,982,876	4,114,542
	Total RTB Receipts Carried Forward	(3,819,684)	(1)	(1)	(0)	(0)

APPENDIX B - HOUSING CAPITAL STRATEGY



		2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/2028	2028/2029
Cost Centre	Scheme	Final Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy
		£	£	£	£	£
	<u>CAPITAL PROGRAMME EXCL. NEW BUILD</u>					
	<u>Planned Investment including Decent Homes</u>					
Various	Decent Homes - Internal/External Works	3,795,020	8,650,000	9,800,000	10,700,000	10,700,000
Various	Decent Homes External Works		500,000	550,000	550,000	550,000
KH299	Insulation Measures		50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000
Various	Decent Homes - Roofing					
Various	Decent Homes - Flat Blocks	10,890,790	5,400,000	250,000	250,000	250,000
KH205	Communal Heating		100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000
KH321	High Rises - Improvement Works	1,271,530	1,750,000	1,750,000		
	<u>Health & Safety</u>					
KH085	Fire Safety	300,000				
KH112	Asbestos Management	230,100	300,000	300,000	300,000	300,000
KH114	Subsidence	137,630	120,000	120,000	120,000	120,000
KH144	Contingent Major Repairs	552,090	500,000	500,000	500,000	500,000
KH327	Building safety		1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000
	<u>Estate & Communal Area</u>					
KH223	Asset Review - Challenging Assets	601,891	600,000	600,000	600,000	600,000
Various	<u>Other HRA Schemes</u>	6,652,032				
	TOTAL CAPITAL PROGRAMME EXCL. NEW BUILD	24,431,083	23,424,077	19,993,134	21,519,212	21,543,326
	<u>SPECIAL PROJECTS & EQUIPMENT</u>					
	<u>HRA Equipment</u>					
KH015	Capital Equipment (including Supported Housing Equip)	36,073				
	Sub Total Special Projects & Equipment	36,073				

APPENDIX B - HOUSING CAPITAL STRATEGY



		2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/2028	2028/2029
Cost Centre	Scheme	Final Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy
		£	£	£	£	£
	<u>CAPITAL PROGRAMME NEW BUILD</u>					
	New Build Programme - eligible for 1-4-1	5,759,859	20,214,117	14,612,000	12,783,580	8,400,000
	New Build Programme - ineligible	1,146,485	7,567,000	22,445,000	5,987,000	
KH233	Open Market Acquisitions (Social Rent)	767,463			891,790	
KH244	Twin Foxes					
KH245	March Hare in Burwell Road (15 Units)	1,107,240	1,637,239		(1,800,000)	
KH247	Kenilworth Close (105 units) (Ineligible 141)	846,485				
	Kenilworth Close 1 for 1 Expenditure (61.8%)	469,190				
KH303	Dunn Close (27 units, 21 main block SA)	1,715,967				
KH333	Brent Court Social Rent	300,000	7,567,000	22,445,000	5,987,000	
	Schemes Under Development	1,700,000	18,576,878	14,612,000	12,800,000	8,400,000
KH072	L.S.S.O. Buy Back					
	TOTAL CAPITAL PROGRAMME NEW BUILD	6,906,344	27,781,117	37,057,000	18,770,580	8,400,000
	<u>INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY</u>					
	<u>IT General (IT)</u>					
KH268	Infrastructure Investment	97,299	194,000	199,000	740,000	764,000
KH336	2024/25	20,000				
	Total General IT	117,299	194,000	199,000	740,000	764,000
	<u>Connected To Our Customers (CTOC)</u>					
KH288	New CRM Technology (Digital Platform)	52,967				
	Total CTOC	52,967				
	<u>Housing All Under One Roof programme (HAUOR)</u>					
KH283	Housing Improvements - Northgate online	118,670				
	Total HAUOR	118,670				
	TOTAL ICT INCLUDING DIGITAL AGENDA	288,936	194,000	199,000	740,000	764,000

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APPENDIX C - GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY

Cost Centre	Scheme	2024/25			2025/26			2026/27		
		Draft Capital Strategy £	Final Capital Strategy £	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy £	Draft Capital Strategy £	Final Capital Strategy £	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy £	Draft Capital Strategy £	Final Capital Strategy £	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy £
	General Fund - Schemes									
	Stevenage Direct Services	5,066,713	4,916,713	(150,000)	1,603,704	6,353,704	4,750,000	0	250,000	250,000
	Housing Development	1,938,907	1,938,907	0	9,652,830	16,202,580	6,549,750	424,498	2,874,748	2,450,250
	Finance and Estates	2,737,244	2,737,244	0	557,000	557,000	0	0	0	0
	Digital & Transformation	378,822	378,822	0	303,373	303,373	0	0	0	0
	Regeneration	13,962,272	13,868,728	(93,544)	23,640,113	27,077,066	3,436,953	1,479,079	1,335,670	(143,409)
	Communities and Neighbourhoods	1,094,629	1,094,629	0	492,410	492,410	0	0	0	0
	Planning and Regulatory	953,273	953,273	0	552,500	552,500	0	0	0	0
	Deferred Works Reserve	387,222	387,222	0	282,000	282,000	0	0	0	0
	Total Schemes	26,519,081	26,275,537	(243,544)	37,083,930	51,820,633	14,736,703	1,903,577	4,460,418	2,556,841
	General Fund -Resources									
BG902	Capital Receipts	5,931,395	6,375,852	444,457	2,161,281	2,461,783	300,502	424,498	674,498	250,000
	SG1 Receipts	0	378,000	378,000	455,000	455,000	0	0	0	0
	Locality Review receipts	15,000	15,000	0	1,514,568	1,214,568	(300,000)	0	0	0
BG905	Ringfenced receipts	2,090,875	1,646,418	(444,457)	0	0	0	0	0	0
BG904	Towns Fund	7,342,497	7,342,497	0	18,807,174	18,807,174	0	1,335,670	1,335,670	0
BG904	Other Grants and other contributions (Towns Fund / Homes England)	1,701,380	1,701,380	0	0	9,150,000	9,150,000	0	0	0
BG904	Contractors Deposits	94,553	94,553	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BG937	Local – Neighbourhood CIL	207,578	207,578	0	97,500	97,500	0	0	0	0
BG903	Capital Reserve (Housing Receipts)	496,190	496,190	0	569,437	568,935	(502)	0	0	0
-	RCCO	95,000	95,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
VAR	Revenue Reserves	697,445	697,445	0	0	617,000	617,000	0	0	0
BG928	Insurance Reserve	10,000	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BG934	Leisure RCCO cfwd	65,970	65,970	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BG929	NDR Reserve	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BG934	Leisure Provision - now reserve	200,000	200,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BG920	New Homes Bonus CNM	242,541	242,541	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BG934	Leisure Reserve - now reserve	140,000	140,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
tbc	Unspecified revenue contribution	38,934	38,934	0	0	617,000	617,000	0	0	0
BG916	Capital Reserve (Revenue Savings)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
-	Prudential Borrowing Approved	2,145,610	1,995,610	(150,000)	2,450,250	3,833,000	1,382,750	0	2,450,250	2,450,250
-	Short Term borrowing and funded from private sale	5,701,558	5,230,014	(471,544)	11,028,720	14,615,673	3,586,953	143,409	0	(143,409)
-	Funding Gap	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total Resources (General Fund)	26,519,081	26,275,537	(243,544)	37,083,930	51,820,633	14,736,703	1,903,577	4,460,418	2,556,841

APPENDIX C - GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY

Cost Centre	Scheme	2024/25			2025/26			2026/27		
		Draft Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy	Draft Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy	Draft Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BG902	General Funds Receipts									
	Unallocated B/fwd	(2,191,306)	(2,191,306)	(0)	(1,436,282)	(1,045,467)	390,815	(1)	(33,684)	(33,683)
	In Year Receipts	(5,676,370)	(5,730,013)	(53,642)	(725,000)	(1,450,000)	(725,000)	(12,240,000)	(12,240,000)	0
	New Garage Sales (£2250k predicted from 26/27 to 31/32 - for GIP)				0	0		(700,000)	(700,000)	0
	Used in Year for capital financing	5,931,395	6,375,852	444,457	2,161,281	2,461,783	300,502	674,498	674,498	0
	Receipts Used to Repay ST Borrowing	0	0	0			0	11,529,140	11,529,140	(0)
	Used to fund sg1 receipts deficit							117,943	117,943	0
	Used to repay LEP loan	500,000	500,000	0			0			0
	General Fund Receipts Unallocated C/fwd	(1,436,281)	(1,045,467)	390,815	(1)	(33,684)	(33,683)	(618,420)	(652,103)	(33,683)
BG911	Locality Review receipts									
	Unallocated B/fwd	(70,000)	(70,000)	0	(1,269,568)	(1,008,568)	261,000	0	(39,000)	(39,000)
	In Year Receipts	(1,214,568)	(953,568)	261,000	(245,000)	(245,000)	0	0	0	0
	Used in Year	15,000	15,000	0	1,514,568	1,214,568	(300,000)	0	0	0
	Receipts Unallocated C/fwd	(1,269,568)	(1,008,568)	261,000	(0)	(39,000)	(39,000)	0	(39,000)	(39,000)
BG905	Ringfenced regeneration receipts									
	Unallocated B/fwd	(2,582,908)	(2,582,908)	0	(1,292,033)	(1,786,490)	(494,457)	(1,408,490)	(1,408,490)	0
	In Year Receipts	(1,300,000)	(1,350,000)	(50,000)	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Used in Year	2,590,875	2,146,418	(444,457)	378,000	378,000	0	0	0	0
	Reserve Unallocated C/fwd	(1,292,033)	(1,786,490)	(494,457)	(914,033)	(1,408,490)	(494,457)	(1,408,490)	(1,408,490)	0
	SG1 Receipts									
	Unallocated B/fwd	451,504	451,504	(0)	451,504	829,504	378,000	829,504	829,504	0
	In Year Receipts			0	(378,000)	(378,000)	0	(333,561)	(333,561)	0
	Costs funded by general receipts							(117,943)	(117,943)	0
	Used in Year	0	378,000	378,000	378,000	378,000	0			0
	Reserve Unallocated C/fwd	451,504	829,504	378,000	451,504	829,504	378,000	378,000	378,000	0
BG904	Grant Contributions Unapplied									
	Unallocated B/fwd	(13,702,267)	(13,702,267)	0	(12,061,161)	(12,061,161)	0	0	0	0
	In Year Receipts	(7,497,324)	(7,497,324)	0	(6,746,013)	(15,896,013)	(9,150,000)	(1,335,670)	(1,335,670)	0
	Used in Year	9,138,430	9,138,430	0	18,807,174	27,957,174	9,150,000	1,335,670	1,335,670	0
	Receipts Unallocated C/fwd	(12,061,161)	(12,061,161)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BG936 & BG937	CIL									
	Unallocated B/fwd	(1,302,667)	(1,302,667)	0	(1,645,089)	(1,645,089)	0	(2,195,089)	(2,195,089)	0
	In Year Resource	(550,000)	(550,000)	0	(550,000)	(550,000)	0	(550,000)	(550,000)	0
	Used in Year	207,578	207,578	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	CIL C/fwd	(1,645,089)	(1,645,089)	0	(2,195,089)	(2,195,089)	0	(2,745,089)	(2,745,089)	0
BG903 & BG916	Capital Reserve and Debt Provision Reserve									
	Unallocated B/fwd	(314,597)	(314,597)	0	(193,687)	(193,687)	0	(168,967)	(32)	168,935
	In Year Resource	(375,280)	(375,280)	0	(375,280)	(375,280)	0	(375,280)	(375,280)	0

APPENDIX C - GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY

Cost Centre	Scheme	2024/25			2025/26			2026/27		
		Draft Capital Strategy £	Final Capital Strategy £	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy £	Draft Capital Strategy £	Final Capital Strategy £	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy £	Draft Capital Strategy £	Final Capital Strategy £	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy £
	Used in Year	496,190	496,190	0	400,000	568,935	168,935	0	0	0
	Capital Reserve Unallocated C/fwd	(193,687)	(193,687)	0	(168,967)	(32)	168,935	(544,247)	(375,312)	168,935
	Stevenage Direct Services									
	Parks & Open Spaces									
KC218	Hertford Road Play Area (S106 Funded)	0	0	0	25,000	25,000	0	0	0	0
KE494	Green Space Access Infrastructure	53,018	53,018	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE542	Flat block waste management infrastructure	18,730	18,730	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE911	Play Area Improvement Programme	480,330	480,330	0	75,000	75,000	0	0	0	0
KE916	Peartree skate park	0	0	0	90,000	90,000	0	0	0	0
KE520	Welfare improvements at out based hubs	10,000	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE543	Shrub bed programme	47,109	47,109	0	44,000	44,000	0	0	0	0
KG002	Garages (GIP)	1,609,610	1,459,610	(150,000)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Growth	Garages (GIP) 10 year plan (£250k/annum)	0	0	0	0	250,000	250,000	0	250,000	250,000
Growth	Garages asbestos roof capital works	0	0	0	0	4,500,000	4,500,000	0	0	0
Growth	Parks Infrastructure	0	0	0	50,000	50,000	0	0	0	0
	Vehicles, Plant, Equipment									
KE497	Trade Waste Containers	20,000	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Various	Vehicle/Plant replacement Programme - see Appendix 'A1 Vehicles'	1,240,174	1,240,174	0	160,000	160,000	0	0	0	0
KE423	Vehicle replacement for KE008ACU (Fiesta)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE512	Vehicle replacement for LK08PVT Roll On/Off FAD CF85 410	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE951	Domestic Recycling Collection Vehicles (x3)	907,544	907,544	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE918	Cleaning machine for the town centre	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE934	Receptacles for new rounds etc	0	0	0	160,000	160,000	0	0	0	0
KE935	Westin Road ABS Pump	5,500	5,500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE936	Vehicles	107,980	107,980	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE937	Trailer vehicle solar panels	16,300	16,300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE938	Purchase of new MEWP (Mobile Elevated Work Platform)	73,850	73,850	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE942	Replace Water Bowers - TRK 16 and TRK25	15,000	15,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE943	Maxi Truck EL 4WD 48V 4WD articulated truck with a 1,000kg - 1,500kg	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE945	Tomcat Industrial Scrubber Dryer - 3 vehicles: MaxVac Urban (57.9), Kec	114,000	114,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE925	Repair closed church wall St Nicholas church	30,000	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE926	roof residual waste bay Cavendish Transfer Station	0	0	0	150,000	150,000	0	0	0	0
Growth	Fuel pumps at Cavendish Road fuel station.	0	0	0	30,000	30,000	0	0	0	0
Growth	Replacement work Cavendish Road fuel station - manhole covers	0	0	0	17,000	17,000	0	0	0	0
KE929	Digital system fleet and workshop operation	38,546	38,546	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE930	Digital system streets and grounds services	56,000	56,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE931	Digital system play area inspections/managment	16,500	16,500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE932	Digital book of remembrance	1,696	1,696	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE933	Asset Management system	10,000	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Vehicles, Plant, Equipment - cont.									
KE598	Food collection vehicles (x5) and associated costs	850,000	850,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE599	Replace four refuse vehicles - VU66 NPY, VU66 NPZ, VU66 NRE, VX17	305,000	305,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

APPENDIX C - GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY



Cost Centre	Scheme	2024/25			2025/26			2026/27		
		Draft Capital Strategy £	Final Capital Strategy £	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy £	Draft Capital Strategy £	Final Capital Strategy £	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy £	Draft Capital Strategy £	Final Capital Strategy £	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy £
KE600	Replace Sweeper - LK20 EJO	65,000	65,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE601	Shovel Loader to replace - FN69 XSU	200,000	200,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Growth	Operational Vehicles	0	0	0	962,704	962,704	0	0	0	0
KE602	Stand on Mowers to replace AN100520 & AN100559	15,000	15,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Stevenage Direct Services		5,066,713	4,916,713	(150,000)	1,603,704	6,353,704	4,750,000	250,000	250,000	250,000
Housing Development Scheme (Joint GF/HRA)										
KG035	Kenilworth - Community Centre	0	0	0	1,223,580	1,223,580	0	0	0	0
Growth	The Oval	0	0	0	0	9,000,000	9,000,000	0	0	0
KG036	Kenilworth - private sale (Malvern Close & Blocks A3&A6)	1,327,907	1,327,907	0	5,979,000	5,979,000	0	424,498	424,498	0
Various	Housing Development Schemes (Joint GF/HRA)	1,327,907	1,327,907	0	7,202,580	16,202,580	9,000,000	424,498	424,498	0
KG038	Marshgate Wholly Owned Housing Development Company (WOC)	611,000	611,000	0	2,450,250	0	(2,450,250)	0	2,450,250	2,450,250
Total Housing Development (including grants to Registered Providers)		1,938,907	1,938,907	0	9,652,830	16,202,580	6,549,750	424,498	2,874,748	2,450,250

APPENDIX C - GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY

Cost Centre	Scheme	2024/25			2025/26			2026/27		
		Draft Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy	Draft Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy	Draft Capital Strategy	Final Capital Strategy	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
	Finance & Estates									
	Estates									
KE526	Cavendish Fire Protection : Urgent and H&S Works	4,563	4,563	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE527	Depots: Planned Preventative Works (reroof)	257,240	257,240	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE529	Community Centres Urgent and H&S Works	3,970	3,970	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE536	Multi Storey Car Park - Installation of emergency lighting	206,434	206,434	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE554	Bedwell Neighbourhood centre canopy repairs	7,555	7,555	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE555	8-10 The glebe roof replacement	1,111	1,111	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE558	MSCP resurface worn stairwell floor	79,856	79,856	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE927	Thermal Image Cameras	140,000	140,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE928	Ph2 fire protection works Cavendish	95,000	95,000	0	255,000	255,000	0	0	0	0
KE559	MSCP / Indoor Market guttering	1,000	1,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR150	Works to improve vacant premises prior to re-letting	19,476	19,476	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR151	Daneshill: Urgent and H&S Works	59,088	59,088	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR152	BTC 2019/20 Backlog H&S Works	27,930	27,930	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR153	BTC Urgent and H&S Works	65,780	65,780	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR154	BTC Planned Preventative Works	179,188	179,188	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR155	EPC Surveys	81,896	81,896	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR156	EPC remedials	209,710	209,710	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR157	Building condition and Insurance valuation Survey	18,800	18,800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR162	Fairlands valley farmhouse roofing works	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR165	Cavendish Road reception access enhancement	189	189	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR166	Cavendish Road manhole covers	48,079	48,079	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR167	Cavendish Road penstock valve	49,886	49,886	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR169	MSCP replacement fuse boards	7,080	7,080	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR170	BTC Essential works - Replace / upgrade doors, Lighting and control	195,000	195,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Growth	Daneshill House boilers	0	0	0	197,000	197,000	0	0	0	0
Growth	Fry Road Nursery	0	0	0	80,000	80,000	0	0	0	0
Growth	All buildings across corporate estate	0	0	0	25,000	25,000	0	0	0	0
KE921	Improvement works to Hampson Park depot	42,600	42,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Estates Cont.									
KR171	Burwell Road shops - Reroofing,	60,000	60,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR172	MSCP fire door replacement	35,000	35,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR173	Commercial - shop units roof works	125,000	125,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR174	Commercial properties - General repairs	100,000	100,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR175	cavendish - IT server room works	65,000	65,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR176	King George V Pavilion - Works to existing Fascia boards	20,000	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR177	Replace 1 FM Team vehicle	28,000	28,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR178	Cavendish - generator	90,000	90,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR916	Commercial Properties Refurbishment (MRC Programme)	359,671	359,671	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KS278	New Management Software	53,143	53,143	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total Finance & Estates	2,737,244	2,737,244	0	557,000	557,000	0	0	0	0

APPENDIX C - GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY

Cost Centre	Scheme	2024/25			2025/26			2026/27		
		Draft Capital Strategy £	Final Capital Strategy £	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy £	Draft Capital Strategy £	Final Capital Strategy £	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy £	Draft Capital Strategy £	Final Capital Strategy £	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy £
	Corporate Projects, Customer Services & Technology									
	IT General									
KS268	Infrastructure Investment	273,605	273,605	0	20,650	20,650	0	0	0	0
KS318	Core ICT Equipment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KS320	Telephony Hardware Refresh	22,500	22,500	0	75,638	75,638	0	0	0	0
KS321	VDI hosting Hardware Refresh	11,250	11,250	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KS322	Hardware Replacment Program	78,660	78,660	0	75,225	75,225	0	0	0	0
KS323	Hardware Replacment Program (HRA Element)	(37,466)	(37,466)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Growth	SBC Idox Re-Tender, and Dell Memory (RAM) for Virtual desktop	0	0	0	131,860	131,860	0	0	0	0
	Total IT General	348,549	348,549	0	303,373	303,373	0	0	0	0
	Connected to Our Customer (CTOC)									
KS274	New CRM Technology	30,273	30,273	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total CTOC	30,273	30,273	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total Corporate Projects, Customer Services & Technology	378,822	378,822	0	303,373	303,373	0	0	0	0
	Regeneration									
KE506	Public Sector Hub	1,309,738	929,988	(379,750)	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Lease buy outs		379,750	379,750	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE585	Public Sector Hub Assembly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE539	Repay LEP Loan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE947	SG1 Joint Venture	4,373,652	3,180,108	(1,193,544)	4,832,939	6,169,892	1,336,953	143,409	0	(143,409)
	Spur Road (Grant funded)	599,705	599,705	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Towns Fund:									
KE538	Towns Fund	0	(600,000)	(600,000)	0	(2,000,000)	(2,000,000)	(88,390)	(88,390)	0
Growth	Old Indoor Market space - reconfiguration			0	0	4,100,000	4,100,000	0	0	0
Growth	Parkplace - works ahead of Inndor Market relocation	0	1,700,000	1,700,000	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE560	Stevenage Enterprise Centre	1,500,000	1,500,000	0	2,500,000	2,500,000	0	0	0	0
KE561	Gunnels Wood Road Infrastructure	979,177	979,177	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE562	Station Gateway	500,000	500,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE563	Marshgate Biotech	0	0	0	207,174	207,174	0	0	0	0
KE564	Stevenage Innovation & Technology Centre (SITEC)	100,000	100,000	0	4,900,000	4,900,000	0	0	0	0
KE565	New Towns Heritage Centre	100,000	100,000	0	1,400,000	1,400,000	0	479,820	479,820	0
KE566	Stevenage Sports & Leisure Club	2,000,000	2,000,000	0	7,450,000	7,450,000	0	326,930	326,930	0
KE469	Leisure Centre (GD1) BUILDINGS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE567	Cycling & Pedestrian Connectivity	1,200,000	1,200,000	0	1,200,000	1,200,000	0	113,320	113,320	0
KE568	Diversification of Retail & Garden Square	1,300,000	1,300,000	0	1,150,000	1,150,000	0	503,990	503,990	0
Various	Towns Fund	7,679,177	8,779,177	1,100,000	18,807,174	20,907,174	2,100,000	1,335,670	1,335,670	0
	Total Regeneration	13,962,272	13,868,728	(93,544)	23,640,113	27,077,066	3,436,953	1,479,079	1,335,670	(143,409)
	Community & Neighbourhoods									
KC202	Fairlands Valley Park - Aqua	3,571	3,571	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC232	SALC and the Swim Centre Urgent and H&S Works	57,992	57,992	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC231	SALC, Swim Centre, and Fairlands Valley Sailing Centre 2019/20 Backlog H&S Works	18,216	18,216	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

APPENDIX C - GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY

Cost Centre	Scheme	2024/25			2025/26			2026/27		
		Draft Capital Strategy £	Final Capital Strategy £	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy £	Draft Capital Strategy £	Final Capital Strategy £	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy £	Draft Capital Strategy £	Final Capital Strategy £	Variance Draft vs Final Capital Strategy £
	Community & Neighbourhoods (continued)									
KC242	SLL Leisure management - end of contract capital provision	235,970	235,970	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC237	Fire stopping works at SALC	77,819	77,819	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Pool cover (to be grant funded)	36,000	36,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC238	Lift replacement at SALC	41,599	41,599	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC240	Replacement Camera programme	40,000	40,000	0	10,000	10,000	0	0	0	0
KC052	Shephalbury Park	5,600	5,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC236	Ridlins Athletics	56	56	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE917	Ridlins Athletics Facility	15,916	15,916	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC243	New Leisure Contract	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC245	Equipment replacement at Fairlands Valley Sailing Centre	31,887	31,887	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC246	Aqua Park - Rubber crumb surface replacement	35,000	35,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC247	Lighting of clock tower - permanent install	65,000	65,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC250	Fire stopping at SALC	220,000	220,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC252	Lift procurement at SALC	160,000	160,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC253	Sailing Centre	10,000	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE118	Lighting Desk SALC - Equipmt & Tools	0	0	0	205,510	205,510	0	0	0	0
Growth	Operational Plant	0	0	0	105,000	105,000	0	0	0	0
Growth	CCTV Upgrade	0	0	0	159,900	159,900	0	0	0	0
Growth	New pumps/aerators to FVP lakes	0	0	0	12,000	12,000	0	0	0	0
Growth	Riddlin - Bolier and Hot Water System	40,000	40,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total Community & Neighbourhoods	1,094,629	1,094,629	0	492,410	492,410	0	0	0	0
	Planning & Regulatory									
KC244	Community Climate Change Fund	117,578	117,578	0	97,500	97,500	0	0	0	0
KC916	Street Scene UKSPF	145,075	145,075	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC917	St Georges MSCP - conversion of store room and boiler room to office space	50,000	50,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE119	Off Street Car Parks (Multi Storey Car Parks)	444,457	444,457	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE120	Park Place Remedials	94,553	94,553	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE201	Hard standings	34,338	34,338	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE217	Parking Restrictions	15,000	15,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE470	Electric Car Charging Points	30,102	30,102	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE531	Workplace Travel Plan	16,172	16,172	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Growth	MSCP Lift Reinstatement	0	0	0	200,000	200,000	0	0	0	0
Growth	Car Parks Resurfacing	0	0	0	140,000	140,000	0	0	0	0
Growth	Car Parks - Lighting Phased Replacement (2 years)	0	0	0	40,000	40,000	0	0	0	0
Growth	MSCP Painting	0	0	0	40,000	40,000	0	0	0	0
Growth	MSCP Fire Alarm Upgrade	0	0	0	25,000	25,000	0	0	0	0
Growth	Parking Restrictions	0	0	0	10,000	10,000	0	0	0	0
KE569	Cashless on street parking transition	5,998	5,998	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total Planning & Regulatory	953,273	953,273	0	552,500	552,500	0	0	0	0
KR911	Deferred Works Reserve	387,222	387,222	0	282,000	282,000	0	0	0	0

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**AUDIT COMMITTEE/ CABINET /
COUNCIL**

Portfolio Area: Resources

Date: 4 February 2025 / 12 February
2025 / 26 February 2025



**ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL
INDICATORS 2025/26**

NON-KEY DECISION

Author – Rhona Bellis
Contributor – Reenu Keogh
Lead Officer – Brian Moldon
Contact Officer – Brian Moldon

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To recommend to Council the approval of the Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26, including its Annual Investment Strategy, Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy following considerations from Audit and Cabinet committees.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Audit Committee

That post consideration by the Audit Committee to the Cabinet, the 2025/26 Treasury Management Strategy is recommended to Council for approval.

2.2 Cabinet

That post consideration by the Cabinet, in addition to those made by the Audit Committee, the 2025/26 Treasury Management Strategy is recommended to Council for approval.

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2.3 Council

That post consideration by the Audit Committee and the Cabinet, the 2025/26 Treasury Management Strategy be approved by Council.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 CIPFA published the updated Treasury Management and Prudential Codes on 20 December 2021 for implementation from 2023/24. This Council therefore, has to have regard to these Codes of Practice when it prepares the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy, and also related reports during the financial year, which are taken to Full Council for approval.
- 3.1.2 The Council is required to operate a balanced budget, which broadly means that cash raised during the year will meet cash expenditure. Part of the treasury management operation is to ensure that this cash flow is adequately planned, with cash being available when it is needed. Surplus monies are invested in low-risk counterparties or instruments commensurate with the Council's low risk appetite, providing adequate liquidity initially before considering investment return.
- 3.1.3 The second main function of the treasury management service is the funding of the Council's capital plans. These capital plans provide a guide to the borrowing need of the Council, essentially the longer-term cash flow planning, to ensure that the Council can meet its capital spending obligations. This management of longer-term cash may involve arranging long or short-term loans or using longer-term cash flow surpluses. On occasion, when it is prudent and economic, any debt previously drawn may be restructured to meet Council risk or cost objectives.
- 3.1.4 The contribution the treasury management function makes to the authority is critical, as the balance of debt and investment operations ensure liquidity or the ability to meet spending commitments as they fall due, either on day-to-day revenue or for larger capital projects. The treasury operations will see a balance of the interest costs of debt and the investment income arising from cash deposits affecting the available budget. Since cash balances generally result from reserves and balances, it is paramount to ensure adequate security of the sums invested, as a loss of principal will in effect result in a loss to the General Fund Balance.
- 3.1.5 CIPFA defines treasury management as:
- “The management of the local authority's borrowing, investments and cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks.”*
- 3.1.6 Whilst any commercial initiatives or loans to third parties will impact on the treasury function, these activities are generally classed as non-treasury activities, (arising usually from capital expenditure), and are separate from the day-to-day treasury management activities.

3.2 Reporting Requirements

3.2.1 Capital Strategy

The Capital Strategy will be brought before members as a separate report. The aim of that strategy is to ensure that all Members of the Council fully understand the overall long-term policy objectives and resulting capital strategy requirements, governance procedures and risk appetite.

3.2.2 Treasury Management reporting

The Council is required to receive and approve (as a minimum) three main treasury reports each year. The annual treasury management strategy including the Prudential Indicators (this report) is forward looking, it is the first and most important of the three and includes:

- a. **Prudential and treasury indicators and treasury strategy** (this report)
 -
 - the capital plans, (including prudential indicators).
 - a minimum revenue provision (MRP) policy, (how residual capital expenditure is charged to revenue over time).
 - the Treasury Management Strategy, (how the investments and borrowings are to be organised), including treasury indicators; and
 - an Annual Investment Strategy, (the parameters on how investments are to be managed).
- b. **A mid-year treasury management report** – This is primarily a progress report and will update members on the capital position, amending prudential indicators as necessary, and whether any policies require revision.
- c. **An annual treasury report** – This is a backward-looking review document and provides details of a selection of actual prudential and treasury indicators and actual treasury operations compared to the estimates within the strategy.

3.2.3 These reports are required to be adequately scrutinised, and this is undertaken by the Audit Committee and Cabinet.

3.2.4 In addition to the three major reports detailed above from 2023/24 quarterly reporting is also required and form an appendix to the quarterly Capital monitoring reports, where not included in the main reports. However, these additional reports do not have to be reported to Full Council but do require to be adequately scrutinised. This role is undertaken by the Cabinet (The reports should comprise updated Treasury / Prudential Indicators only).

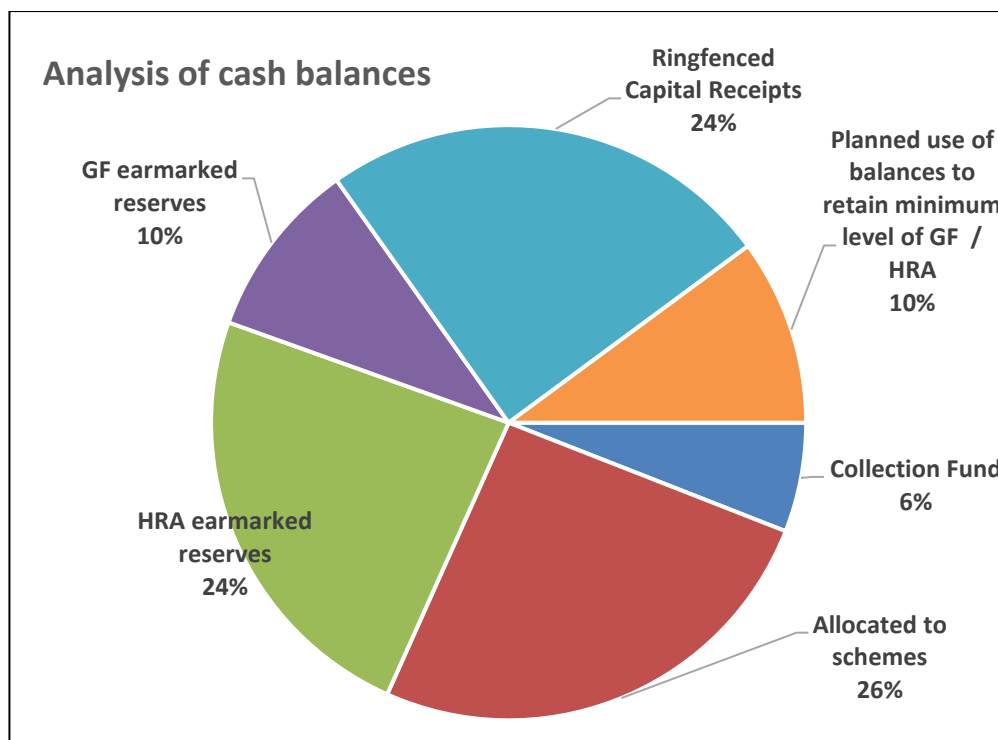
4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 Performance of Current Treasury Strategy

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- 4.1.1 For the financial year to 31 December 2024 returns on investments have averaged 5.22% and total interest earned was £1.706Million contributing to General Fund and Housing Revenue Account income.
- 4.1.2 Cash balances as of 31 December 2024 were £57.8Million and are forecast to be £37Million as of 31 March 2025. The Council's balances are made up of cash reserves e.g., HRA and General Fund balances, restricted use receipts such as right to buy one for one receipts and balances held for provisions such as business rate appeals, reduced by internal borrowing.
- 4.1.3 In considering the Council's level of cash balances, Members should note that the General Fund MTFs and Capital Strategy have a planned use of resources over a minimum of five years and the HRA Business Plan (HRA BP) a planned use of resources over a 30-year period, which means, while not committed in the current year; they are required in future years.
- 4.1.4 The Council's current investment portfolio is held for Treasury management purposes only and consists of "conventional" cash investments: deposits with banks and building societies, Money Market Funds and loans to other Local Authorities. Currently no investments have been made with any of the other approved instruments within the Specified and Non-specified Investment Criteria (see Appendix D).
- 4.1.5 There have been **no breaches** of treasury **counter party limits**, with the investment activity during the year conforming to the approved strategy. Any breach would be notified to the Chief Finance Officer. The Council has had no liquidity difficulties and no funds have been placed with the Debt Management Office (DMO) during 2024/25 to date, demonstrating that counterparty limits and availability for placing funds approved in the TM Strategy were working effectively. It is possible that surplus funds borrowed during the year may be placed in the DMO temporarily if cash balances, due to the timing of taking out new loans would breach other counterparty limits.
- 4.1.6 The following chart shows the planned use of cash balances forecast to be held at 31 March 2025.

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4.2 Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26

4.2.1 The strategy for 2025/26 covers two main areas:

Capital issues

- the capital expenditure plans and the associated prudential indicators.
- the minimum revenue provision (MRP) policy.

Treasury management issues

- the current treasury position.
- treasury indicators which limit the treasury risk and activities of the Council.
- prospects for interest rates.
- the borrowing strategy.
- policy on borrowing in advance of need.
- debt rescheduling.
- the investment strategy.
- creditworthiness policy; and
- the policy on use of external service providers.

4.2.2 These elements cover the requirements of the Local Government Act 2003, MHCLG Investment Guidance, MHCLG MRP Guidance, the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management Code.

4.2.3 The Council's Treasury Management Policy Statement can be found at **Appendix A**.

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4.2.4 The Council's Capital Strategy is reported separately from the Treasury Management Strategy. Non-treasury investments are reported through the former, ensuring the separation of the core treasury function under security, liquidity and yield principles, and the policy and commercialism investments usually driven by expenditure on an asset.

4.2.5 The revised Treasury Management Code requires all investments and investment income to be attributed to one of the following three purposes: -

- **Treasury management**

Arising from the organisation's cash flows or treasury risk management activity, this type of investment represents balances which are only held until the cash is required for use. Treasury investments may also arise from other treasury risk management activity which seeks to prudently manage the risks, costs or income relating to existing or forecast debt or treasury investments.

- **Service delivery**

Investments held primarily and directly for the delivery of public services including housing, regeneration and local infrastructure. Returns on this category of investment which are funded by borrowing are permitted only in cases where the income is "either related to the financial viability of the project in question or otherwise incidental to the primary purpose".

- **Commercial return**

Investments held primarily for financial return with no treasury management or direct service provision purpose. Risks on such investments should be proportionate to an authority's financial capacity – i.e., that 'plausible losses' could be absorbed in budgets or reserves without unmanageable detriment to local services. An authority must not borrow to invest primarily for financial return.

4.2.6 The Council's current investment portfolio is held for Treasury management purposes only.

4.2.7 **Environmental, social and governance (ESG)** investment considerations - investment considerations here means understanding the ESG "risks" that the council is exposed to and evaluating how well it manages these risks. It is NOT the same as Socially Responsible Investing.

4.2.8 Managing the ESG risk is already part of the current Treasury Investment Strategy, as the council uses mainstream rating agencies to assess counterparty creditworthiness – they now incorporate ESG risks alongside more traditional financial risk metrics when assessing counterparty ratings.

4.3 Training

4.3.1 The CIPFA Code requires the responsible officer to ensure that members with responsibility for treasury management receive adequate training in treasury management. This especially applies to members responsible for scrutiny.

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4.3.2 The last training arranged for members took place in November 2024, further training will be arranged as required.

4.3.3 The training needs of treasury management officers are periodically reviewed.

4.3.4 A formal record of the training received by officers central to the Treasury function will be maintained by the Head of Technical Accounting. Similarly, a formal record of the treasury management training received by members will also be maintained by the Head of Technical Accounting.

4.4 Treasury Management Consultants

4.4.1 The Council uses MUFG Corporate Markets Treasury Limited (MUFG - formerly Link Asset Services) as its external treasury management advisors.

4.4.2 The Council recognises that responsibility for treasury management decisions always remains with the organisation and will ensure that undue reliance is not placed upon the services of our external service providers. All decisions will be undertaken with regards to all available information, including, but not solely, our treasury advisors.

4.4.3 It also recognises that there is value in employing external providers of treasury management services to acquire access to specialist skills and resources. The Authority will ensure that the terms of their appointment and the methods by which their value will be assessed are properly agreed and documented and subjected to regular review.

4.5 THE CAPITAL PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2025/26-2027/28

The Council's capital expenditure plans are the key driver of treasury management activity. The output of the capital expenditure plans is reflected in the prudential indicators, which are designed to assist members' overview and confirm capital expenditure plans.

4.5.1 **Capital Expenditure and Financing** – this prudential indicator is a summary of the Council's capital expenditure plans, both those agreed previously, and those forming part of the Capital Strategy 2025/26. Members are asked to approve the capital expenditure forecasts: -

Capital Expenditure	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
£000	Actual	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
Non-HRA	8,880	26,276	51,821	4,460	0
HRA	37,568	31,662	51,399	57,249	41,030
Total	46,448	57,938	103,220	61,710	41,030

4.5.2 The table below summarises the above capital expenditure plans and how these plans are being financed by capital or revenue resources. Any shortfall of resources results in a funding borrowing need.

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Financing of Capital Expenditure £000	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate	2027/28 Estimate
Capital receipts	4,830	14,604	16,648	5,579	5,060
Capital grants and contributions	7,202	11,982	39,464	5,798	5,313
Capital reserves	132	496	569	0	0
Revenue	3,830	4,960	617	3,390	4,439
Major Repairs Reserve	18,429	18,671	13,138	13,532	13,938
Net financing need for the year	34,422	50,713	70,436	28,299	28,750
Capital Expenditure requiring borrowing	12,026	7,225	32,784	33,411	12,280

4.6 The Council's Borrowing Need (the Capital Financing Requirement) -

The second prudential indicator is the Council's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). The CFR is simply the total historic outstanding capital expenditure which has not yet been paid for from either revenue or capital resources. It is essentially a measure of the Council's indebtedness and so its underlying borrowing need. Any capital expenditure above, which has not immediately been paid for through a revenue or capital resource, will increase the CFR.

4.6.1 The CFR does not increase indefinitely, as the minimum revenue provision (MRP) is a statutory annual revenue charge which broadly reduces the indebtedness in line with each asset's life, and so charges the economic consumption of capital assets as they are used.

4.6.2 The CFR includes any other long-term liabilities (e.g., finance leases). Whilst these increase the CFR, and therefore the Council's borrowing requirement, these types of schemes include a borrowing facility by the lease provider and so the Council is not required to separately borrow for these schemes.

4.6.3 The Council is asked to approve the CFR projections below:

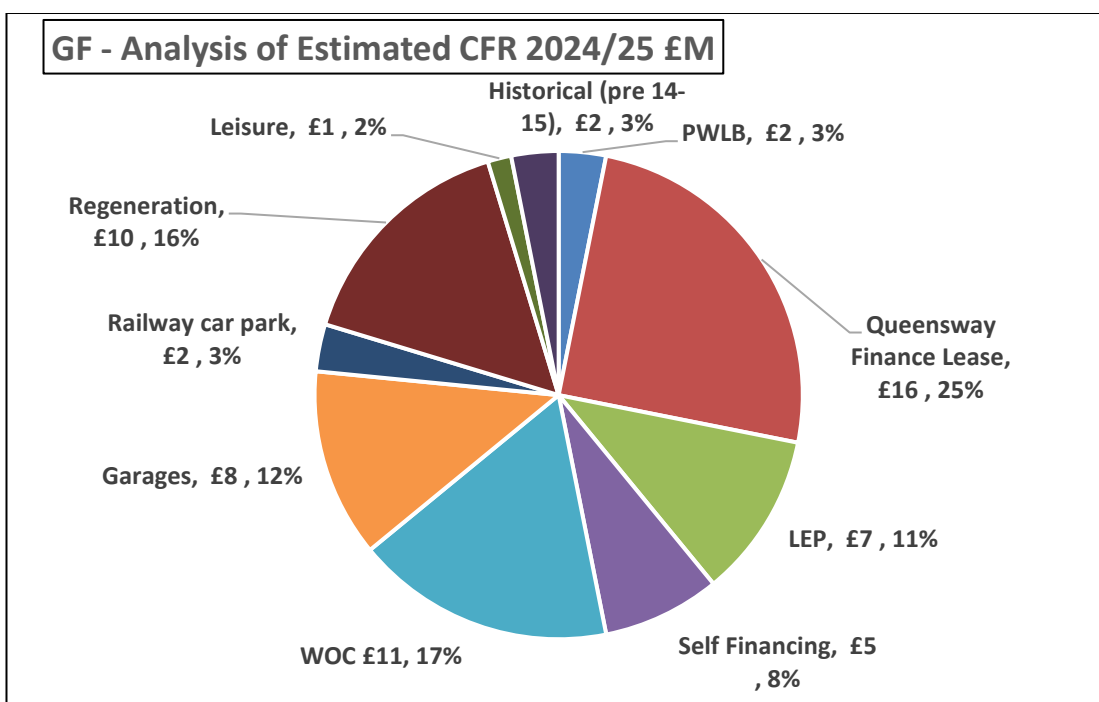
£000	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate	2027/28 Estimate
Capital Financing Requirement					
General Fund excluding Finance Lease	42,160	47,924	54,626	45,471	33,700
Finance Lease	16,475	16,208	15,935	15,654	15,357
Total General Fund	58,635	64,133	70,561	61,125	49,057
Housing	272,394	272,356	286,179	309,125	312,692
Total CFR	331,029	336,489	356,740	370,250	361,749
Movement in CFR		5,470	20,251	13,511	(8,500)

Movement in CFR represented by					
Net financing need for the year (above)		7,225	32,784	33,411	12,280
Internal and External debt repayments		(1,000)	(11,656)	(18,918)	(19,806)

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£000	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate	2027/28 Estimate
Less MRP/VRP ¹ and other financing movements		(756)	(877)	(981)	(974)
Movement in CFR		5,470	20,251	13,511	(8,500)

4.6.4 The general fund CFR is made up mainly of internal borrowing as illustrated below for 2024/25.



4.7 Liability Benchmark

4.7.1 A third prudential indicator is the Liability Benchmark (LB). The Council is required to estimate and measure the LB for the forthcoming financial year and the following two financial years.

Financial Year End	2024 £'000	2025 £'000	2026 £'000
(Over)/Under Liability Benchmark	4,798	(1,919)	0

4.7.2 This benchmark compares actual loan debt outstanding and the liability benchmark (loans less investments, plus a liquidity buffer). Years where actual loans are less than the benchmark (negative value) indicate a future borrowing requirement; any years where actual loans outstanding exceed the benchmark (positive value) represent a technically overborrowed position.

4.7.3 The table above shows the current forecast overborrowed position remaining over the short term. This shows that in each year, there are theoretical investment balances that if unallocated, could be used to pay off debt.

¹ Voluntary Revenue Provision

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4.7.4 Investment balances held by the council are already allocated and are not available for repayment of debt or additional capital expenditure. As a result, the Council will need to externally borrow to replace internal borrowing in the medium term.

4.7.5 Cashflow is monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that the timing of external borrowing to support the Capital Strategy and Treasury function is undertaken in a timely and prudent manner.

4.8 Core Funds and Expected Investment Balances

4.8.1 The application of resources (capital receipts, reserves etc.) to either finance capital expenditure or other budget decisions to support the revenue budget will have an ongoing impact on investments unless resources are supplemented each year from new sources (asset sales etc.). Detailed below are estimates of the year-end balances for each resource and anticipated day-to-day cash flow balances.

Year End Resources £000	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate	2027/28 Estimate
Fund balances / reserves	90,484	59,681	52,693	47,961	48,070
Provisions	4,361	3,361	2,361	2,361	2,361
Total core funds	94,845	63,042	55,054	50,322	50,431
Working capital*	2,854	33,105	25,000	10,324	3,155
(Under)/over borrowing	(72,497)	(64,228)	(50,054)	(30,646)	(20,617)
Expected investments	25,202	31,919	30,000	30,000	32,969

*Working capital balances shown are estimated year-end; these may be higher mid-year

4.9 Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Statement

4.9.1 Under Regulation 27 of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (England) Regulations 2003, where the Council has financed capital expenditure by borrowing it is required to make a provision each year through a revenue charge (MRP). The 2003 Regulations have been further amended with full effect from April 2025 to expressly provide that in determining a prudent provision local authorities cannot exclude any amount of CFR from its calculation, unless by an exception set out in statute.

4.9.2 The Council is required to calculate a prudent provision of MRP which ensures that the outstanding debt liability is repaid over a period that is reasonably commensurate with that over which the capital expenditure provides benefits.

4.9.3 The MRP policy statement requires full council approval in advance of each financial year. The Council is recommended to approve the MRP Statement at **Appendix B** to this report.

4.10 Borrowing

4.10.1 The capital expenditure plans set out in paragraph 4.5.1 provide details of the service activity of the Council. The treasury management function ensures that the Council's cash is organised in accordance with the relevant professional codes, so that sufficient cash is available to meet this service activity and the Council's Capital Strategy. This will involve both the

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organisation of the cash flow and, where capital plans require, the organisation of appropriate borrowing facilities. The strategy covers the relevant treasury / prudential indicators, the current and projected debt positions, and the Annual Investment Strategy.

4.10.2 Current Portfolio Position

The overall treasury management portfolio as at 31 March 2024 and as at 31 December 2024 are shown below for both borrowing and investments.

TREASURY PORTFOLIO		
£000	actual	current
	31.3.24	31.12.24
Total treasury investments	25,202	57,815
Treasury external borrowing:		
PWLB	234,987	247,987
Finance Leases and other external borrowing	23,543	21,715
Total external borrowing	258,530	269,702
Net treasury investments / (borrowing)	(233,328)	(211,887)

4.10.3 The Council's forward projections for borrowing are summarised below. The table shows the actual external debt, against the underlying capital borrowing need, highlighting any over or under borrowing.

£000	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
	Actual	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
External Debt					
Debt at 1 April	251,693	258,532	272,261	306,686	339,604
Expected change in Debt	7,500	13,996	23,530	33,199	1,824
Expected change in Other long-term liabilities (OLTL)	(259)	(266)	(273)	(281)	(296)
Actual gross external debt at 31 March	258,532	272,261	306,686	339,604	341,132
The Capital Financing Requirement	(331,029)	(336,489)	(356,740)	(370,250)	(361,749)
(Under) / over borrowing external debt	(72,497)	(64,228)	(50,054)	(30,646)	(20,617)

4.10.4 Within the range of prudential indicators there are several key indicators to ensure that the Council operates its activities within well-defined limits. One of these is that the Council needs to ensure that its gross debt does not, except in the short-term, exceed the total of the CFR in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional CFR for 2025/26 and the following two financial years. This allows some flexibility for limited early borrowing for future years but ensures that borrowing is not undertaken for revenue or speculative purposes.

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4.10.5 Based on the capital programme 2025/26 (February 2025 Update) resourcing projections, the Council has the following borrowing requirements in 2025/26:

- General Fund £3.8Million in relation to the Garages Improvement Plan (£1.7Million) and other commercial property works (£2.1Million).
- HRA £31.4Million of which £17Million is to replace internal borrowing and £14.4Million for new capital expenditure.

4.10.6 The current PWLB borrowing rate is unusually high and costs of external borrowing as taken into account when the Council allocates funding to capital projects. The Borrowing strategy is considered later in the report.

4.10.7 The S151 officer reports that the Council complied with this prudential indicator in the current year and does not envisage difficulties for the future. This view takes account of current commitments, existing plans and the proposals in this budget report.

4.11 Treasury Indicators: Limits to Borrowing Activity

4.11.1 **The Operational Boundary.** This is the limit beyond which external debt is not normally expected to exceed. In most cases, this would be a similar figure to the CFR but may be lower or higher depending on the levels of actual debt and the ability to fund under-borrowing by other cash resources.

Operational Boundary £000	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate	2027/28 Estimate
General Fund	49,133	55,561	46,125	34,057
General Fund additional borrowing facility available to the Housing (WOC) Wholly Owned Company	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000
Total - General Fund	64,133	70,561	61,125	49,057
HRA	272,356	286,179	309,125	312,692
Total	336,489	356,740	370,250	361,749
Previous Operational Boundary	355,749	373,964	399,360	375,132

4.11.2 **The Authorised Limit for external debt.** This is a key prudential indicator and represents a control on the maximum level of borrowing. This represents a legal limit beyond which external debt is prohibited, and this limit needs to be set or revised by the Full Council. It reflects the level of external debt which, while not desired, could be afforded in the short-term, but is not sustainable in the longer-term.

- This is the statutory limit determined under section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003. The Government retains an option to control either the total of all local authority plans, or those of a specific authority, although this power has not yet been exercised.
- The Council is asked to approve the following Authorised Limit:

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Authorised Limit £000	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Estimate	2026/27 Estimate	2027/28 Estimate
General Fund Finance lease	16,208	15,935	15,654	15,357
General Fund Borrowing for capital expenditure including WOC	54,924	61,626	52,471	40,700
Total Borrowing - General Fund	71,132	77,561	68,125	56,057
Borrowing - HRA	283,356	297,179	320,125	323,692
Total	354,488	374,740	388,250	379,749
Previous Authorised Limit	373,549	391,764	416,360	392,132

4.12 Prospects for Interest Rates

4.12.1 The Council retains MUFG as its treasury advisor and part of their service is to assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates. MUFG provided the following forecasts on 20 January 2025. These PWLB rates exclude the Certainty Rate (the standard rate minus 20 bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1 November 2012. Please note, the lower Housing Revenue Account (HRA) PWLB rate started on 15 June 2023 (standard rate minus 60 bps).

Interest Rate Forecasts								
Bank Rate	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26
MUFG CM	4.50%	4.25%	4.00%	4.00%	3.75%	3.75%	3.75%	3.50%
Cap Econ	4.50%	4.25%	4.00%	3.75%	3.50%	3.50%	3.50%	3.50%
5Y PWLB RATE								
MUFG CM	4.90%	4.80%	4.60%	4.50%	4.50%	4.40%	4.30%	4.20%
Cap Econ	5.10%	4.90%	4.80%	4.60%	4.60%	4.50%	4.50%	4.40%
10Y PWLB RATE								
MUFG CM	5.10%	5.00%	4.80%	4.80%	4.70%	4.50%	4.50%	4.40%
Cap Econ	5.30%	5.10%	5.00%	4.80%	4.80%	4.70%	4.60%	4.60%
25Y PWLB RATE								
MUFG CM	5.50%	5.40%	5.30%	5.20%	5.10%	5.00%	4.90%	4.80%
Cap Econ	5.70%	5.50%	5.30%	5.00%	4.90%	4.90%	4.80%	4.70%
50Y PWLB RATE								
MUFG CM	5.30%	5.20%	5.10%	5.00%	4.90%	4.80%	4.70%	4.60%
Cap Econ	5.30%	5.20%	5.20%	5.10%	5.00%	4.90%	4.80%	4.80%

4.12.2 The Bank of England (BOE) base rate stands at 4.75% currently and is expected to remain at this level for the first quarter of 2025, reducing gradually thereafter when both the CPI inflation and wage/employment data are supportive of such a move.

4.12.3 The CPI measure of inflation (a key bank of England KPI driving decisions on interest rates) is now 2.5%. The BOE expects inflation to rise to around 2.75% over the next year as household energy prices provide less of a drag on inflation than they have done in recent months. Inflation is expected to fall back to the 2% target after that.

4.12.4 Regarding the PWLB forecast, these have been materially lifted since the last update, to not only reflect our increased concerns around the future path of

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inflation, but also the increased level of Government borrowing over the term of the current Parliament.

4.12.5 The short to medium part of the curve is forecast to remain elevated over the course of the next year, and the degree to which rates moderate will be tied to the arguments for further Bank Rate loosening or otherwise. The longer part of the curve will also be impacted by inflation factors, but there is also the additional concern that with other major developed economies such as the US and France looking to run large budget deficits there could be a glut of government debt issuance that investors will only agree to digest if the interest rates paid provide sufficient reward for that scenario.

4.12.6 Invariably the direction of US Treasury yields in reaction to a new presidential term, and change in core policies will, in all probability, impact UK gilt yields. So, there are domestic and international factors that could impact PWLB rates whilst, as a general comment, geo-political risks abound in Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

4.13 Current Borrowing Position

4.13.1 The estimated Council's capital financing requirement (CFR) for 2024/25 is £336Million. The CFR denotes the Council's underlying need to borrow for capital purposes. If the CFR is positive the Council may borrow from the PWLB or the market (external borrowing), or from internal balances on a temporary basis (internal borrowing). The balance of external and internal borrowing is generally driven by market conditions. The Council had £272Million in external debt at 31 December 2024, of which PWLB debt and its purpose is detailed in the table below.

Purpose of Loan	PWLB Loan £'000
General Fund Regeneration Assets	1,756
HRA	
Decent Homes	38,320
Self-Financing	207,911
Total HRA Loans	246,231
Total PWLB Debt at 31st December 2024	247,987

4.13.2 The Council is forecast to utilise (short term) £59Million of cash flow funds in lieu of borrowing. This is a prudent and cost-effective approach in the current economic climate but will require ongoing monitoring if any upside risk to gilt yields prevails.

4.13.3 External borrowing for the HRA of £13Million has been taken in 2024/25. The capital programme is being kept under regular review because of inflationary pressures, shortages of materials and labour. Our borrowing strategy will, therefore, also be regularly reviewed and then revised, if necessary, to achieve optimum value and risk exposure in the long-term.

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4.13.4 The General Fund has PWLB external borrowing of £1.8Million and other external borrowing of £7.6Million (Local Enterprise Partnership - LEP) and finance lease of £16.5Million (Aviva). Discussions are continuing with the LEP regarding making these re-investible loans for further regeneration of the town, rather than needing to be repaid on the dates originally agreed. As indicated in the table, the current position is that the remaining balance is repayable - £6.57Million in 2030 and £1Million in 2025. The loans are at zero interest.

Table 5: LEP Loans					
Loan Received	Site Assembly	Land Assembly	SG1	Repaid	Total
2015/16	762,488			(208,795)	553,693
2018/19	416,306				416,306
2019/20		4,108,709			4,108,709
2020/21		1,491,291	500,000		1,991,291
2022/23			500,000		500,000
Total	1,178,794	5,600,000	1,000,000	(208,795)	7,569,999

4.13.5 The Aviva finance lease entered in 2018/19 for 37 years was immediately sublet to Queensway Properties (Stevenage) LLP for 37 years.

4.13.6 The HRA has external borrowing from PWLB of £246Million

- £7.763Million from pre-2012,
- £4.010Million taken out in 2019/20,
- £10.0 Million taken out in 2020/21,
- £9.047Million taken out in 2021/22,
- £7.5Million taken out in 2023/24 and
- £13Million taken out in 2024/25.

The remainder of £194.911 Million relates to HRA self-financing payment made to central government in 2012.

4.13.7 The target average borrowing rate in the latest HRA MTFS is 4.88% in 2024/25 and 4.4% in 2025/26.

4.13.8 The HRA BP includes a heightened reserves provision going forward to mitigate the risk associated with having a higher borrowed BP.

4.13.9 Finance leases entered between the HRA and Marshgate Ltd during 2021/22 and 2022/23, the Council's Wholly Owned Housing Company, relating to 10 residential dwellings, leased for 25 years amounted to £1.3Million.

4.14 Borrowing Strategy

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- 4.14.1 The Council is currently maintaining a non-fully funded position. This means that the capital borrowing need, (the Capital Financing Requirement), has not been fully funded with loan debt as cash supporting the Council's reserves, balances and cash flow has been used as a temporary measure. This strategy is prudent as medium and longer dated borrowing rates are expected to fall from their current levels once prevailing inflation concerns are addressed by tighter near-term monetary policy.
- 4.14.2 Against this background and the risks within the economic forecast, caution will be adopted with the 2025/26 treasury operations. The Assistant Director of Finance will monitor interest rates in financial markets and adopt a pragmatic approach to changing circumstances.
- 4.14.3 Borrowing may be taken to facilitate investment in regeneration and/or economic improvements for the town. This may include investment in special purpose vehicles owned by the Council to facilitate regeneration aspirations. Any such investments will be presented to Members.

4.15 Policy on Borrowing in advance of Need

- 4.15.1 It is the Council's intention not to borrow more than or in advance of its needs purely to profit from the investment of the extra sums borrowed. Any decision to borrow in advance will be within forward approved Capital Financing Requirement estimates and will be considered carefully to ensure that value for money can be demonstrated and that the Council can ensure the security of such funds.
- 4.15.2 In determining whether borrowing will be undertaken in advance of need the Council will.
- ensure that there is a clear link between the capital programme and maturity profile of the existing debt portfolio which supports the need to take funding in advance of need
 - ensure the ongoing revenue liabilities created, and the implications for the future and budgets have been considered
 - evaluate the economic and market factors that might influence the manner and timing of any decision to borrow
 - consider the merits and demerits of alternative forms of funding
 - consider the alternative interest rate bases available, the most appropriate periods to fund and repayment profiles to use.

4.16 Rescheduling

- 4.16.1 Rescheduling of current borrowing in the debt portfolio may be considered whilst premature redemption rates remain elevated but only if there is surplus cash available to facilitate any repayment, or rebalancing of the portfolio to provide more certainty is considered appropriate.

4.17 New Financial Institutions as a Source of Borrowing and / or Types of Borrowing

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- 4.17.1 Currently the PWLB Certainty Rate is set at gilts + 80 basis points. However, consideration may still need to be given to sourcing funding from the following sources for the following reasons:
- 4.17.2 Local authorities (primarily shorter dated maturities out to 3 years or so – generally still cheaper than the Certainty Rate).
- 4.17.3 Financial institutions (primarily insurance companies and pension funds but also some banks, out of forward dates where the objective is to avoid a “cost of carry” or to achieve refinancing certainty over the next few years).
- 4.17.4 Our advisors will keep us informed as to the relative merits of each of these alternative funding sources.
- 4.17.5 The latest list of approved borrowing sources is in Appendix F. These options allow flexibility if funds are required for the short or medium term in order to minimise costs where possible.

4.18 ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

- 4.18.1 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and CIPFA have extended the meaning of ‘investments’ to include both financial and non-financial investments. This report deals solely with treasury (financial) investments, (as managed by the treasury management team). Non-financial investments, essentially the purchase of income yielding assets and service investments, are covered in the Capital Strategy, (a separate report).
- 4.18.2 In managing the TM function other areas kept under review include:
- Training opportunities available to Members and officers (the most recent training for Members took place on 26 November 2024)
 - That those charged with governance are also personally responsible for ensuring they have the necessary skills and training
 - A full mid-year review of the TMS will be reported in 2025/26.
- 4.18.3 The 2025/26 Strategy uses the credit worthiness service provided by MUFG the Council’s treasury advisors. This service uses a sophisticated modelling approach which utilises credit ratings from the three main credit rating agencies and is compliant with CIPFA code of practice.
- 4.18.4 While MUFG may advise the Council, the responsibility for treasury management decisions always remains with the Council and officers do not place undue reliance on the external service advice.
- 4.18.5 The TM limits for 2025/26 (Appendix D) have been reviewed. No changes are considered necessary since that agreed as part of the Mid-Year Review of 2024/25.
- 4.18.6 The latest list of “Approved Countries for Investment” is detailed in Appendix E. This lists the countries that the Council may invest with providing they meet the minimum credit rating of AA- . The Council retains the discretion not to invest in countries that meet the minimum rating but where there are concerns over human rights issues.

4.19 Non-Treasury Investments

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4.19.1 The CIPFA Prudential and Treasury Codes recommend that authorities' capital strategies should include a policy and risk management framework for all investments. The Codes identify three types of local authority investment:

- Treasury management investments, which are taken to manage cashflows and as part of the Council's debt and financing activity
- Commercial investments (including investment properties), which are taken mainly to earn a positive net financial return (previously purchased commercial investments only as Council's are no longer permitted to access PWLB rates if they invest in commercial investments primarily for gain.
- Service investments, which are taken mainly to support service outcomes

4.19.2 Details of the Annual Investment Strategy can be found in Appendix A.

4.20 Investment returns expectations

4.20.1 The current BOE base rate of 4.75% is expected to reduce to 4.5% by March 2025. The suggested budgeted investment earnings rates for returns on investments placed for periods up to about three months during each financial year are as follows: -

Average earnings in each year	
2025/26	4.1%
2026/27	3.7%
2027/28	3.5%
2028/29	3.5%
Years 6+	3.5%

4.20.2 As there are so many variables at this time, caution must be exercised in respect of all interest rate forecasts.

4.20.3 Against this view the forecast of interest earned on Treasury investments in 2025/26 is £1.7Million based on average balances of £44Million.

4.20.4 For its cash flow generated balances, the Council will seek to utilise its business reserve instant access and notice accounts, Money Market Funds and short-dated deposits, to benefit from the compounding of interest.

4.21 Changes of investment strategy

4.21.1 There are no proposed changes to the Strategy for 2025/26.

4.22 OTHER ISSUES

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- 4.22.1 **UK Sovereign rating and investment criteria:** The UK sovereign rating is currently on the lowest acceptable level suggested for approved countries as set out in Appendix E. The Council's investment criteria only use countries with a rating of AA- or above. The UK rating will be exempt from the sovereign rating investment criteria so in this event if it were to result in the UK being downgraded below AA- it would not impact on the Council's ability to invest with UK institutions. Other investment criteria will be considered in this event to ensure security of funds for the Council.
- 4.22.2 **Queensway Properties (Stevenage) LLP:** In December 2018, the Council entered into a 37-year agreement with Aviva to facilitate the regeneration of Queensway in the town centre. A separate legal entity, Queensway Properties (Stevenage) LLP, was incorporated to manage the rental streams and costs associated with the scheme.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

- 5.1.1 This report is of a financial nature and reviews the treasury management function for 2024/25 to date. Any consequential financial impacts identified in the Capital strategy and Revenue budget monitoring reports have been incorporated into this report.
- 5.1.2 During the financial year Officers operated within the treasury and prudential indicators set out in the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement and in compliance with the Council's Treasury management practices.

5.2 Legal Implications

- 5.2.1 Approval of the Prudential Code Indicators and the Treasury Management Strategy are intended to ensure that the Council complies with relevant legislation and best practice.
- 5.2.2 There have been no changes to PWLB borrowing arrangements or changes to the Prudential and Treasury Management codes since the last Treasury report.

5.3 Risk Implications

- 5.3.1 The current policy of minimising external borrowing only remains financially viable while cash balances are high and the differentials between investment income and borrowing rates remain. As these conditions change the Council may need to take borrowing at higher rates which would increase revenue costs.
- 5.3.2 The Council's Treasury Management Strategy is based on limits for counterparties to reduce risk of investing with only a small number of institutions.

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5.3.3 The thresholds and time limits set for investments in the Strategy are based on the relative ratings of investment vehicles and counter parties. These are designed to consider the relative risk of investments and to preclude certain grades of investments and counterparties to prevent loss of income to the Council.

5.3.4 There is a risk to the HRA BP's ability to fund the approved 30-year spending plans if interest rates rise above planned rates - this will be included in future revisions to the BP.

5.4 Equalities and Diversity Implications

5.4.1 This report is technical in nature and there are no implications associated with equalities and diversity within this report. In addition to remaining within agreed counterparty rules, the council retains the discretion not to invest in countries that meet the minimum rating but where there are concerns over human rights issues. Counterparty rules will also be overlaid by any other ethical considerations from time to time as appropriate.

5.4.2 The Treasury Management Policy does not have the potential to discriminate against people on grounds of age; disability; gender; ethnicity; sexual orientation; religion/belief; or by way of financial exclusion. As such a detailed Equality Impact Assessment has not been undertaken.

5.5 Climate Change Implications

5.5.1 The council's investment portfolio is invested in sterling investments and not directly in companies. These investments are short term and mainly used for working capital purposes. The council uses mainstream rating agencies to assess counterparty creditworthiness – they now incorporate ESG risks alongside more traditional financial risk metrics when assessing counterparty ratings. In this way the TM team aligns with the Councils ambition to attempt to be carbon neutral by 2030.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- BD1 Treasury Management Strategy including Prudential Code Indicators 2024/25 (Council February 2024)

APPENDICES

- Appendix A Treasury Management Strategy (TMS)
- Appendix B Minimum Revenue Provision Policy
- Appendix C Prudential Indicators
- Appendix D Specified and Non-Specified Investment Criteria
- Appendix E Approved Countries for investment
- Appendix F Approved Sources of Long and Short-term Borrowing

Appendix A Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26

1. Treasury Management Policy Statement

- 1.1. The Council defines its treasury management activities as: “*The management of the Council’s investments and cash flows, its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks*”.
- 1.2. The Council regards the successful identification, monitoring and control of risk to be the prime criteria by which the effectiveness of its treasury management activities will be measured. Accordingly, the analysis and reporting of treasury management activities will focus on their risk implications for the organisation.
- 1.3. The Council acknowledges that effective treasury management will provide support towards the achievement of its business and service objectives. It is therefore committed to the principles of achieving value for money in treasury management, and to employing suitable comprehensive performance measurement techniques, within the context of effective risk management.
- 1.4. This Strategy has been prepared in accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code 2021. The Code requires the Council to approve the Treasury Management Strategy annually and to produce a mid-year and annual report. In addition, Members in both Executive and Scrutiny functions receive monitoring reports and regular reviews. The aim of these reporting arrangements is to ensure that those with ultimate responsibility for the treasury management function appreciate fully the implications of treasury management policies and activities, and that those implementing policies and executing transactions have properly fulfilled their responsibilities regarding delegation and reporting.
- 1.5. The Act requires the Council to set out its Treasury Management Strategy for borrowing and to prepare an Annual Investment Strategy to set out the Council’s policies for managing its investments and for giving priority to the security and liquidity of those investments.

2. Annual Investment Strategy

2.1. Investment Policy – Management of Risk

- 2.1.1. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and CIPFA have extended the meaning of ‘investments’ to include both financial and non-financial investments. This report deals solely with treasury (financial) investments, (as managed by the treasury management team). Non-financial investments, essentially the purchase of income yielding assets and service investments, are covered in the Capital Strategy, (a separate report).

The Council’s investment policy has regard to the following:

- MHCLG’s Guidance on Local Government Investments (“the Guidance”)
- CIPFA Treasury Management in Public Services Code of Practice and Cross Sectoral Guidance Notes 2021 (“the Code”)
- CIPFA Treasury Management Guidance Notes 2021

The Council’s investment priorities will be security first, portfolio liquidity second and then yield, (return). The Council will aim to achieve the optimum return (yield) on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity and regarding the Council’s risk appetite.

In the current economic climate, it is considered appropriate to maintain a degree of liquidity to cover cash flow needs but to also consider “laddering” investments for periods up to 12 months with high credit rated financial institutions, whilst investment rates remain elevated, as well as wider range fund options.

2.1.2. The guidance from the MHCLG and CIPFA place a high priority on the management of risk. This Council has adopted a prudent approach to managing risk and defines its risk appetite by the following means: -

- a. Minimum acceptable **credit criteria** are applied in order to generate a list of highly creditworthy counterparties. This also enables diversification and thus avoidance of concentration risk. The key ratings used to monitor counterparties are the short term and long-term ratings.
- b. **Other information:** ratings will not be the sole determinant of the quality of an institution; it is important to continually assess and monitor the financial sector on both a micro and macro basis and in relation to the economic and political environments in which institutions operate. The assessment will also take account of information that reflects the opinion of the markets. To achieve this consideration the Council will engage with its advisors to maintain a monitor on market pricing such as “**credit default swaps**” and overlay that information on top of the credit ratings.
- c. **Other information sources** used will include the financial press, share price and other such information pertaining to the banking sector in order to establish the most robust scrutiny process on the suitability of potential investment counterparties.
- d. This Council has defined the list of **types of investment instruments** that the treasury management team are authorised to use. There are two lists in Appendix D under the categories of ‘specified’ and ‘non-specified’ investments.
 - **Specified investments** are those with a high level of credit quality and subject to a maturity limit of one year.
 - **Non-specified investments** are those with less high credit quality, may be for periods in excess of one year, and/or are more complex instruments which require greater consideration by members and officers before being authorised for use.

The Council has determined that it will limit the maximum total exposure to non-specified investments as detailed in Appendix D.

- e. **Lending limits and Transaction Limits**, (amounts and maturity), for each counterparty will be set through applying the matrix table in Appendix D and will consider investments longer than 365 days
- f. This Council has engaged **external consultants**, MUFG Corporate Markets Treasury Limited (MUFG – formerly Link Asset Services), to provide expert advice on how to optimise an appropriate balance of security, liquidity and yield, given the risk appetite of this Council in the context of the expected level of cash balances and need for liquidity throughout the year.
- g. All investments will be denominated in **sterling**.

- h. The Council only invests in counterparties with a high credit quality in the UK or other countries meeting minimum AA- sovereign rating. The Council understands that changes have taken place to the ratings agencies and that their new methodologies mean that sovereign ratings are now of lesser importance in the assessment process. However, the Council continues to specify a minimum sovereign rating as the underlying domestic and where appropriate, international, economic and wider political and social background will still have an influence on the ratings of a financial institution (see Appendix E).
- i. As a result of the change in accounting standards for 2023/24 under IFRS 9, this Council will consider the implications of investment instruments which could result in an adverse movement in the value of the amount invested and resultant charges at the end of the year to the General Fund. (In November 2018, the MHCLG, concluded a consultation for a temporary override to allow English local authorities time to adjust their portfolio of all pooled investments by announcing a statutory override to delay implementation of IFRS 9 for five years ending 31.3.23. More recently, a further extension to the over-ride to 31.3.25 has been agreed by Government.
- j. However, this Council will also pursue value for money in treasury management and will monitor the yield from investment income against appropriate benchmarks for investment performance. Regular monitoring of investment performance will be carried out during the year.

2.2. Creditworthiness policy

- 2.2.1. The primary principle governing the Council's investment criteria is the security of its investments, although the yield or return on the investment is also a key consideration. Based on this this main principle, the Council will ensure that:
 - It maintains a policy covering the categories of financial instruments it will invest in, maximum investment duration, criteria for choosing counterparties with adequate security, and monitoring their security.
 - It has sufficient liquidity in its investments. For this purpose, it will set out procedures for determining the maximum periods for which funds may prudently be committed. These procedures also apply to the Council's Prudential indicators of the maximum principal sums invested more than 364 days.
- 2.2.2. The Assistant Director (Finance) will maintain a counterparty list in compliance with the criteria in the Strategy for Specified and Non-Specified Investment and will revise the criteria and submit them to Council for approval as necessary.
- 2.2.3. In determining the credit quality, the Council uses the Fitch credit ratings, together with Moody and Standard & Poor's equivalent where rated. Not all counterparties are rated by all three agencies and the Council will use available ratings.
- 2.2.4. The Council also applies the creditworthiness service provided by MUFG Asset Services. This service employs a sophisticated modelling approach utilising credit ratings from the three main credit rating agencies - Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's. The credit ratings of counterparties are supplemented with the following overlays:
 - Credit watches and credit outlooks from credit rating agencies.

- Credit Default Swap (CDS) spreads. A CDS is a contract used to insure the holder of a bond against default by the issuer. A CDS can act as an indicator of default risk and provide an early warning of likely changes in credit ratings.
- Sovereign ratings to select counterparties from only the most creditworthy countries.

MUFG Asset Services modelling approach combines credit ratings, credit watches and credit outlooks in a weighted scoring system which is then combined with an overlay of CDS spreads for which the product is a series of colour coded bands which indicate the relative creditworthiness of counterparties. These colour codes are used by the Council to determine the suggested duration for investments.

2.2.5. Credit ratings will be monitored whenever an investment is to be made, using the most recent information. The Council is alerted to changes to ratings of all three agencies through its use of the MUFG creditworthiness service.

- If a downgrade results in the counterparty / investment scheme no longer meeting the Council's minimum criteria, its further use as a new investment will be withdrawn immediately.
- In addition to the use of credit ratings the Council will be advised of information in movements in credit default swap spreads against the iTraxx benchmark and other market data daily via its Passport website, provided exclusively to it by MUFG Asset Services. Extreme market movements may result in downgrade of an institution or removal from the Council's lending list.

2.2.6. Sole reliance will not be placed on the use of this external service. In addition, the Council will also use market data including information on government support for banks and the credit ratings of that government support.

2.2.7. The Council receives updates from MUFG on future changes to Money Market Funds (MMF) that might affect the liquidity or risk of the fund. The Council is likely to change its approach to the use of MMF should liquidity or risk be adversely affected.

2.2.8. There are alternatives to the PWLB for borrowing, for both the General Fund and the HRA, including the UK Municipal Bonds Agency. The UKMBA provides funding through three lending programmes. Current UKMBA trading levels in the market, inclusive of all fees, are lower than the PWLB Certainty rate at like maturities.

- Proportionally guaranteed, pooled loans of £1 million or more for maturities greater than one year.
- Standalone loans to a single local Council for £250 million or more for maturities greater than one year. These loans are outside of the proportional guarantee and are guaranteed solely by the borrower, who must obtain an external credit rating from one or more of the major credit rating agencies.
- Short term, pooled loans, outside of the proportional guarantee for maturities of less than one year.

To date the borrowing rates available were lower than those offered for comparable loans available from the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) at the time of issuance. The Council may make use of this alternative source of borrowing as and when appropriate.

2.3. Investment Strategy

2.3.1. **In-house funds.** Investments will be made with reference to the core balance and cash flow requirements, anticipated capital financing requirements and the outlook for short-term interest rates (i.e., rates for investments up to 12 months). Greater returns are usually obtainable by investing for longer periods. While most cash balances are required to manage the ups and downs of cash flow, where cash sums can be identified that could be invested for longer periods, the value to be obtained from longer term investments will be carefully assessed.

- If it is thought that Bank of England base rate (Bank Rate) is likely to rise significantly within the time horizon being considered, then consideration will be given to keeping most investments as being short term or variable.
- Conversely, if it is thought that Bank Rate is likely to fall within that time period, consideration will be given to locking in higher rates currently obtainable, for longer periods.

3. Country limits

3.1. The Council has determined that it will only use approved counterparties from UK or selected countries with a minimum sovereign credit rating of AA- from Fitch Ratings (or equivalent from other agencies if Fitch does not provide). This is part of the criteria used to produce the Council's Counterparty List.

4. Borrowing Strategy and Policy on Borrowing in Advance of Need

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 with loan debt as cash supporting the Council's reserves, balances and cash flow has been used as a temporary measure. The current strategy is prudent as medium and longer dated borrowing rates are expected to fall from their current levels as current high inflation rates are expected to continue to reduce throughout 2025/26.

4.2. Against this background and the risks within the economic forecast, caution will be adopted with the 2025/26 treasury operations. The Assistant Director of Finance will monitor interest rates in financial markets and adopt a pragmatic approach to changing circumstances. When prudent to do so "internal borrowing" will be replaced with external borrowing in order to reduce interest rate risk.

4.3. Borrowing may be taken to facilitate investment in regeneration and/or economic improvements for the town. This may include investment in special purpose vehicles owned by the Council to facilitate regeneration aspirations. Any such investments will be presented to Members.

4.4. The Council will not borrow more than or in advance of its needs purely to profit from the investment of the extra sums borrowed. Any decision to borrow in advance will be considered carefully to ensure value for money can be demonstrated and that the Council can ensure the security of such funds.

4.5. In determining whether borrowing will be undertaken in advance of need the Council will:

- ensure that there is a clear MUFG between the capital programme and maturity profile of the existing debt portfolio which supports the need to take funding in advance of need

- ensure the ongoing revenue liabilities created, and the implications for the future plans and budgets have been considered
 - evaluate the economic and market factors that might influence the manner and timing of any decision to borrow
 - consider the merits and demerits of alternative forms of funding
 - consider the alternative interest rate bases available, the most appropriate periods to fund and repayment profiles to use.
- 4.6. Borrowing may be taken to facilitate investment in regeneration and/or economic improvements for the town. This may include investment in special purpose vehicles owned by the Council to facilitate regeneration aspirations. Any such investments will be presented to Members.

5. End of year investment report

5.1. At the end of the financial year, the Council will report on its investment activity as part of its Annual Treasury Outturn Report.

6. Policy on the use of external service providers

6.1. In October 2023, the Council reappointed MUFG Asset Services (formerly Link) as its treasury management advisors on a three-year contract. The new contract commenced on 1 November 2023.

6.2. The Council recognises that responsibility for treasury management decisions always remains with the organisation and will ensure that undue reliance is not placed upon our external service providers.

6.3. It also recognises that there is value in employing external providers of treasury management services to acquire access to specialist skills and resources. The Council will ensure that the terms of their appointment and the methods by which their value will be assessed are properly agreed and documented and subjected to regular review.

7. Scheme of Delegation and Role of Section 151 officer

7.1. The Council has the role of:

- receiving and reviewing reports on treasury management policies, practices and activities
- approval of annual strategy.
- approval of/amendments to the organisation's adopted clauses, treasury management policy statement and treasury management practices
- budget consideration and approval
- approval of the division of responsibilities
- receiving and reviewing regular monitoring reports and acting on recommendations
- approving the selection of external service providers and agreeing terms of appointment

7.2. **The Audit Committee** has the role of reviewing the policy and procedures and making recommendations to Council.

7.3. The Section 151 Officer has the role of:

- recommending clauses, treasury management policy/practices for approval, reviewing the same regularly, and monitoring compliance
- submitting regular treasury management policy reports
- submitting budgets and budget variations

- receiving and reviewing management information reports
- reviewing the performance of the treasury management function
- ensuring the adequacy of treasury management resources and skills, and the effective division of responsibilities within the treasury management function
- ensuring the adequacy of internal audit, and liaising with external audit
- recommending the appointment of external service providers.
- preparation of a capital strategy to include capital expenditure, capital financing, non-financial investments and treasury management, with a long-term timeframe ensuring that the capital strategy is prudent, sustainable, affordable and prudent in the long term and provides value for money
- ensuring that due diligence has been carried out on all treasury and non-financial investments and is in accordance with the risk appetite of the Council
- ensure that the Council has appropriate legal powers to undertake expenditure on non-financial assets and their financing
- ensuring the proportionality of all investments so that the Council does not undertake a level of investing which exposes the Council to an excessive level of risk compared to its financial resources
- ensuring that an adequate governance process is in place for the approval, monitoring and ongoing risk management of all non-financial investments and long-term liabilities
- provision to Members of a schedule of all non-treasury investments including material investments in subsidiaries, joint ventures, loans and financial guarantees
- ensuring that members are adequately informed and understand the risk exposures taken on by a Council
- ensuring that the Council has adequate expertise, either in house or externally provided, to carry out the above
- creation of Treasury Management Practices which specifically deal with how non treasury investments will be carried out and managed, to include the following (covered in Annual Capital Strategy Report).

In addition, high value and/or urgent payments can be made by CHAPS by the Treasury Team, however as these can have a material impact on cash flows on the day, authorisation for this type of payment must be obtained from the S151 or deputy S151 Officer.

7.4. Reporting arrangement to the Council and the Audit Committee is as below:

Area of Responsibility	Council Committee	Frequency
Treasury Management Policy Statement (revised)	Council	Initial adoption in 2010

Area of Responsibility	Council Committee	Frequency
Treasury Management Strategy / Annual Investment Strategy / Prudential Indicators and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy	Council	Annually before the start of the year
Treasury Management Strategy / Annual Investment Strategy / Prudential Indicators and MRP policy – mid-year report	Council	Annually before the end of the year
Treasury Management Strategy / Annual Investment Strategy / Prudential Indicators and MRP policy – updates or revisions at other times	Council	As required.
Annual Treasury Outturn Report	Council	Annually by 30 th November
Scrutiny of Treasury Management Strategy	Audit Committee	Annually before the start of the year
Scrutiny of Treasury Management performance (mid year)	Audit Committee	Annually by 31 st December

Appendix B (February 2025 Update)

Minimum Revenue Provision Policy

Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement 2025/26

From 2013/14, the council has not had a fully funded capital programme, and although there has not been a need to borrow in full externally, due to the use of investment balances, it is necessary to make adequate provision for the repayment of debt in the form of Minimum Revenue Provision.

The **preferred method for existing underlying borrowing is Option 3 – the Asset Life Method** (out of 4 allowable options – the council can use a mixture of options), whereby the MRP will be spread over the useful life of the asset which range. Useful life is dependent on the type of asset and was reviewed in 2019/20. Following that review asset lives now ranges from 7 years (ICT equipment) to 50 years (Investment properties, regeneration sites and car parks for example).

In applying the new asset lives historic MRP had been overpaid and in accordance with current MHCLG MRP Guidance can be reclaimed in future years. The council has a policy to ring fence costs and income associated with regeneration assets and as such has shown these MRP changes separately, see table below. The overpayment of £1,057,660.39 results in no MRP needing to be charged to the accounts for the regeneration assets until 2025/26, when a partial charge will be required, utilising the remainder of the overpayment balance.

voluntary MRP made		Use of overpayment	
	Regeneration		Regeneration
2012/13	£46,929.65	2020/21	£193,703.12
2013/14	£140,788.95	2021/22	£193,703.12
2014/15	£163,165.30	2022/23	£193,703.12
2015/16	£141,355.30	2023/24	£193,703.12
2016/17	£141,355.30	2024/25	£193,703.12
2017/18	£141,355.30	2025/26	£89,144.79
2018/19	£141,355.30		
2019/20	£141,355.30		
cumulative total	£1,057,660.39	cumulative total	£1,057,660.39

Capital expenditure financed by borrowing in 2024/25 will not be subject to an MRP charge until 2025/26, or in the financial year following the one which the asset first becomes available for use.

The Council will apply the asset life method for any expenditure capitalised under a Capitalisation Direction.

Leases - the adoption of International Financial Reporting Standard 16 has introduced a single lessee accounting model and requires a lessee to recognise assets and liabilities for all leases with a term of more than 12 months unless the underlying asset is low value.

Regarding MRP in respect of assets acquired either under leases where a right-of-use asset is on the balance sheet or where on-balance sheet PFI contracts are in place, the prudent charge to revenue is measured as being equal to the element of the rent/charge that goes to write down the balance sheet liability.

Investment property - MRP is chargeable in respect of investment properties where acquisition results in an increase to the CFR.

Capital Loans - where the Council has issued capital loans that are categorised as non-commercial, the provision of MRP will not apply on the following basis:

- (a) the loan is treated as capital expenditure in accordance with regulation 25(1)(b),
- (b) the loan is not a commercial loan, and
- (c) the local council has not recognised, in accordance with proper practices(c), any expected or actual credit loss in respect of that loan.

A commercial loan is defined in regulation 27(5) as a loan from the council to another entity for a purpose which, if the council were to undertake itself, would be primarily for financial return; or, where the loan is itself capital expenditure undertaken primarily for financial return.

The Council has determined that MRP is not required for borrowing or credit arrangements used to finance capital expenditure on housing assets and accounted for within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) as it has determined, through its duty to charge depreciation and hold a Major Repairs Reserve, that prudent provision has been made.

The council will make MRP provisions with respect to any debt used to finance a commercial capital loan.

Capital Receipts - for capital expenditure on loans to third parties where the principal element of the loan has been repaid in annual instalments, the capital receipts arising from the principal loan repayments will be used to reduce the CFR instead of MRP.

Where no principal repayment is made in a given year, MRP will be charged using the Asset Life Method.

Share Capital - where an Council incurs expenditure that is capitalised on or after April 2008, which is financed by borrowing for the acquisition of share capital, Regulation 25(1)(d) Acquisition of share capital sets out the maximum period for an council to provide MRP of 20 years.

THE CAPITAL PRUDENTIAL AND TREASURY INDICATORS 2025/26 – 2027/28

The Authority's capital expenditure plans are the key driver of treasury management activity. The output of the capital expenditure plans is reflected in the prudential indicators, which are designed to assist members' overview and confirm capital expenditure plans.

(a) Capital Expenditure

Capital expenditure is where the Council spends money on assets, such as property or vehicles that will be used for more than one year. This includes spending on assets owned by other bodies, loans and grants to other bodies enabling them to buy assets.

Capital Expenditure	2025/26 Final Capital Strategy £000	2026/27 Estimate £000	2027/28 Estimate £000
General Fund	26,276	51,821	4,460
HRA	31,662	51,399	57,249
Total Capital Expenditure	57,938	103,220	61,710

(b) Affordability Prudential Indicator

The previous sections cover the overall capital and control of borrowing prudential indicators, but within this framework prudential indicators are required to assess the affordability of the capital investment plans. These provide an indication of the impact of the capital investment plans on the Authority's overall finances. The Authority is asked to approve the following indicators: -

Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream

Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream %	2024/25 Estimate %	2025/26 Final Capital Strategy %
General Fund	-5%	-2%
HRA	12%	15%

General Fund: Net revenue stream is the RSG, NNDR grant and Council Tax raised for the year.

HRA: The net revenue stream is the total HRA income shown in the Council's accounts from received rents, service charges and other incomes. The ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream reflects the high level of debt as a result of self financing.

The estimates of financing costs include current commitments and the proposals in this budget report.

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**Specified and Non-specified Investment Criteria
(including Treasury Limits and Procedures)**

Table 1

Specified Investments are sterling denominated with maturities up to maximum of one year and must meet the following minimum high credit quality criteria:

Investment Counterparty	Investment Instrument	Minimum High Credit Quality Criteria	Investment Duration
Banks or Building Societies	Overnight Deposit	Fitch: Short Term F1 and Long Term A and Moody, Standard & Poor, equivalent where rated, the lowest rating used where different OR Part-nationalised or Nationalised UK banking institutions (subject to regular reviews of government share percentage).	Maximum duration as per Treasury Advisor's (MUFG's) colour coded Credit List, and less than one year
	Notice Account		
	Short Term Deposit		
Debt Management Office or UK Local Authority	Any deposit	No limit.	
Money Market Funds	Instant Access or with Notice	AAA rated	Instant Access or notice period up to one year

Table 2

Non-Specified Investment are sterling denominated with a maturity longer than one year but no longer than five years, and must meet the following criteria:

Investment Counterparty	Investment Instrument	Minimum High Credit Quality Criteria	Investment Duration
Banks or Building Societies	Any deposits with maturity up to a maximum of five years	Fitch: Short Term F1+ and Long Term AA- and Moody, Standard & Poor, equivalent where rated, the lowest rating used where different	Maximum duration suggested by Treasury Advisor's (MUFG's) colour coded Credit List, and not in excess of five years
Debt Management Office or UK Local Authority		No Limit.	

Table 3

Treasury Limits

Investment Instrument	Cash balances less than £30Million	Cash balances higher than £30Million
	Limits	Limits
Variable Rate Investments (Excluding Enhanced Cash Funds)	Maximum holding £30M	Maximum holding 100%
Counterparty limits (to encompass all forms of investment)	Maximum £5M	Maximum £10M
Instant Access Or Overnight Deposit	Maximum holding 100%	
Fixed Rate less than 12 month maturity	Maximum holding 100%	
Fixed Rate more than 12 months to maturity (includes all types of Fixed Rate Investments i.e. Certificates of Deposits)	Maximum £5M	Maximum £10M
Money Market Funds - Traditional Instant Assess (Counterparty Limit per Fund)	Maximum £5M per MMF	Maximum £10M per MMF
	No limit on total cash held	
Enhanced Cash Funds	Maximum £3M	
Certificates of Deposits	Maximum £5M	
Property Funds	Maximum of £3M - No durational limit. Use would be subject to consultation and approval	

Procedures of Applying the Criteria and Limits

Before the Treasury Team makes an investment, the Team will follow the follow procedure to ensure full compliance with the Specified and Non-Specified Criteria and Treasury Limits:

1 Check that the Counterparty is on the Counterparty List (also known as Current Counterparty Report for Stevenage) produced by MUFG Asset Services (LAS), specifically meeting the Council's Specified and Non-specified Minimum High Credit Quality Criteria in the above Table 1 & 2. If it is not on the list, the Treasury Team will not invest with them.

2 If the Counterparty is on the list, then the Treasury Team refers to the Credit List produced by LAS in colour coding, to determine the maximum investment duration suggested for the deposit, as per the column of Suggested Duration (CDS Adjusted with manual override).

3 Refer to the Treasury Limits in the above Table 3 to ensure the amount invested complies with the Treasury Limits.

Approved Countries for Investments

This list is based on those countries which have sovereign ratings of AA- or higher, (shown - the lowest rating from Fitch, Moody's and S&P) and also, (except - at the time of writing - for Hong Kong and Luxembourg), have banks operating in sterling markets which have credit ratings of green or above in the Link creditworthiness service.

Based on lowest available rating (as at 25.11.24)

AAA

- Australia
- Denmark
- Germany
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Singapore
- Sweden
- Switzerland

AA+

- Canada
- Finland
- U.S.A.

AA

- Abu Dhabi (UAE)
- Qatar

AA-

- Belgium
- France
- **U.K.**

The UK is exempt from the sovereign rating criteria as recommended by MUFG. The UK sovereign rating is currently AA-.

The above list includes the possible countries the Council may invest with. Not all of these countries are used or will be used in treasury management investments

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Approved Sources of Long and Short-term Borrowing 2025/26

On Balance Sheet	Fixed	Variable
PWLB	●	●
UK Municipal Bond Agency	●	●
Local Authorities	●	●
Banks	●	●
Pension Funds	●	●
Insurance Companies	●	●
UK National Wealth Fund	●	●
Market (long-term)	●	●
Market (temporary)	●	●
Market (LOBOs)	●	●
Stock Issues	●	●
Local Temporary	●	●
Local Bonds	●	
Local Authority Bills	●	●
Overdraft		●
Negotiable Bonds	●	●
Internal (capital receipts & revenue balances)	●	●
Commercial Paper	●	
Medium Term Notes	●	
Finance Leases	●	●

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Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Environment and Performance
Date 12 February 2025



NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY UPDATE AND ADOPTION OF REVISED SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENTS

KEY DECISION

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide Members with an overview of changes to three Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD).
- 1.2 To provide Members with a brief update to changes in national planning legislation and guidance.
- 1.3 To seek Members' approval to adopt three amended SPDs: Parking Provision, Developer Contributions and Design Guidance SPDs.
- 1.4 It is important for Cabinet to note and acknowledge that the key reason for the Council's proposals to revise its existing adopted SPDs is to ensure that the Council has a complete and up to date, technically compliant suite of Planning Policy documents, supporting the Local Plan – Partial Review and Update when it is submitted to the Secretary of State later this year; otherwise the existing SPDs run the risk of being out of date in regard to upcoming planning decisions. The updated SPDs will create further positive benefits for the local community.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the content of the three revised Stevenage Supplementary Planning Documents: Parking Provision SPD, Developer Contributions SPD and Design Guidance SPD; and note the public consultation on the three revised Supplementary Planning Documents, held between 14 October and 24 November 2024.
- 2.2 Approve adoption of the three revised Supplementary Planning Documents: Parking Provision SPD, Developer Contributions SPD and Design Guidance SPD, from 28 February 2025.
- 2.3 Agree that delegated powers be granted to the Interim Assistant Director: Planning and Regulation, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance, to make minor amendments as necessary in the final preparation of the SPD documents prior to adoption.
- 2.4 Note that the comments of the Planning & Development Committee on the content of this Report will be sought and fed back to Cabinet.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) are produced to add detail to the policies included in an adopted Local Plan [BD1]. They are used to build upon and provide further guidance for development on specific sites or on particular issues. Whilst they are not part of the Development Plan¹ for an area, and cannot add unnecessarily to the financial burdens on development, the contents of a SPD are a material consideration when determining a planning application.
- 3.2 Applications will be assessed against the standards contained within them. The SPDs should be read in conjunction with policies in the adopted Stevenage Local Plan.

Policy Background

- 3.3 The procedure to adopt a SPD is set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. In summary, the process runs as follows:
 - Prepare draft SPD;
 - Minimum 4-week public consultation (normally 6 weeks);
 - Process public consultation responses;
 - Revise SPD to take account of responses;
 - Publish summary of all consultation responses (consultation statement);
 - Adopt new SPD.

¹ The Development Plan for an area comprises the adopted Local Plan, the Waste Local Plan, the Minerals Local Plan and any adopted Neighbourhood Plans (of which there are none currently in Stevenage).

- 3.4 The Council has already adopted a suite of SPDs, including:
- Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport SPD (adopted October 2020) [BD2]
 - Developer Contributions SPD (adopted March 2021) [BD3]
 - Design Guidance SPD (adopted January 2023) [BD4]

- 3.5 A fourth SPD, “The Impact of Development on Biodiversity” SPD, previously adopted in March 2021, was revoked in November 2023 following approval by this Cabinet [BD5]. A statement of revocation was forwarded to the Secretary of State to this effect.

Parking Provision & Sustainable Transport SPD

- 3.6 The current Parking Provision & Sustainable Transport SPD was adopted on 12 October 2020.

- 3.7 The Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has been produced to supplement policies SP6, IT5, and IT8 of the Stevenage Local Plan (adopted 2019). Upon adoption, it replaced the Stevenage Borough Council Parking Provision SPD (adopted 2012).

- 3.8 The purpose of this document is to explain the Council’s proposed approach to parking provision within new developments. Its intention is to provide clear guidance and certainty for developers and communities. As well as guidance on traditional aspects of parking, the SPD also provides guidance on related issues not covered in the previous Parking Provision SPD with the aim of promoting sustainable modes of transport.

- 3.9 Standards are put forward for the quantity of car parking, cycle parking, and disabled parking at all new developments. The document also provides guidance on the layout and design of these. Requirements for the provision of charging infrastructure are given to help ensure the expected rise in electric vehicle-use is realised and support is given for the implementation and installation of a cycle hire scheme and cycling hubs in line with the Council’s promotion of cycling. The use of public transport is also covered by this document with references to bus priority measures and the potential for a park and ride scheme.

- 3.10 The SPD provides further planning guidance under the following sections:

- Residential Parking Standards
- Non-Residential Parking Standards
- Mixed-Use Sites and Town Centre Parking Provision
- Electrical Charging
- Additional Requirements
- Cycle Parking Standards
- Transport Statements, Assessments, and Travel Plans

- Design and Layout
- Accessibility Contributions

Developer Contributions SPD

- 3.11 The current Developer Contributions SPD was adopted on 18 March 2021.
- 3.12 The aim of this SPD is to set out the Council's proposed approach to the use of Section 106 (S106) agreements to secure developer contributions from new developments. This will assist planning officers, applicants, service providers, Councillors and members of the public through the planning application process, ensuring that the process is fair and transparent and is applied consistently.
- 3.13 Developer Contributions, commonly known as planning obligations, are legal obligations entered into to mitigate impacts of a proposed development. They are entered into under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990(2) by the developer and / or landowner, the local planning authority, and potentially other service or infrastructure providers linked to a proposal or mitigation scheme. They are legally binding and enforceable.
- 3.14 The other main form of developer contribution is the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Stevenage Borough Council adopted a CIL Charging Schedule in January 2020 and started implementing CIL on 1 April 2020. CIL is a non-negotiable charge on new built development which meets the thresholds identified in the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations (2010) (3) (as amended). CIL replaces the need to secure developer contributions through S106 agreements in many instances, allowing for infrastructure and service provision to be planned and implemented on a more strategic, borough-wide scale rather than in a piecemeal approach as mitigation against the impacts of individual developments.
- 3.15 The Council must publish its CIL funding priorities each year in an Infrastructure Funding Statement. Like S106 agreements, CIL liabilities are legally binding and enforceable, albeit through different legislative procedures.
- 3.16 The Council will still require applicants to enter into S106 agreements in some instances. This document sets out the instances where S106 agreements will be sought, what will be included in them, and how contributions will be calculated.
- 3.17 In essence, this document should be used to identify where developer contributions may be required in addition to the payment of a CIL charge for a proposed development. The Council advises that applicants always engage fully with the local planning authority and other infrastructure / service providers near the time of submitting an application to gain a better understanding of the exact amounts they may be expected to contribute.
- 3.18 The main topics covered in this SPD are:
- Community Infrastructure Levy
 - Hertfordshire County Council contributions
 - Housing
 - Commuted Sums to mitigate against policy non-compliance

- Site-specific mitigation
- Employment opportunities
- Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport (linked to Parking Provision & Sustainable Transport SPD)
- Monitoring fees

Design Guidance SPD

- 3.19 The current Design Guidance SPD was adopted on 30 January 2023.
- 3.20 Stevenage Design Guidance supports the strategic and detailed policies in the Stevenage Borough Local Plan. This guidance forms a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which is an additional ‘material consideration’ in planning decisions. This guidance replaced the Stevenage Design Guide 2009; updating advice where appropriate and providing new guidance on matters introduced or strengthened in the Local Plan including long-term sustainability through the use of durable, low maintenance materials.
- 3.21 This Stevenage Design Guidance sets out clear design principles to guide future development in Stevenage. It encourages a design led approach to all development, from large residential schemes to modest residential extensions and small infill developments.
- 3.22 The SPD provides design principles for all developments, accompanied by illustrations and good practice examples, to help deliver good design and clearly signpost where more detailed guidance can be accessed.
- 3.23 The National Design Guide (2021) notes that well-designed places have individual characteristics which work together to create its physical character. These ten characteristics help to nurture and sustain a sense of community. They work positively to address environmental issues affecting climate. They all contribute towards the cross-cutting themes for good design set out in the NPPF.
- 3.24 This document is divided up into each of these ten characteristics in order to ensure that this guidance reflects accurately the characteristics of the National Design Guide:
- Context
 - Identity
 - Built Form
 - Movement
 - Nature
 - Public Spaces
 - Uses
 - Homes and Buildings
 - Resources
 - Lifespan

National Planning Policy Changes

- 3.25 The previous version of the NPPF was updated on 20 December 2023 [BD6]. Key suggestions by Government for plan-making in the future for Stevenage Borough Council to consider, include:
- Plan-makers will have until 30 June 2025 to submit their local plans, neighbourhood plans, minerals and waste plans, and spatial development strategies for independent examination under the existing legal framework. The Government is also proposing that, to be examined under existing legislation, all independent examinations of local plans, minerals and waste plans and spatial development strategies must be concluded, with plans adopted by 31 December 2026.
 - Authorities that do not meet the 30 June 2025 submission deadline for 'old-style' plans will need to prepare plans under the new plan-making system.
 - Authorities will be required to start work on new plans by, at the latest, five years after adoption of their previous plan, and to adopt that new plan within 30 months. Plans that will become more than five years old during the first 30 months of the new system will continue to be considered 'up-to-date' for decision-making purposes for 30 months after the new system starts.
 - Authorities will no longer be able to prepare supplementary planning documents (SPDs) in the revised planning system. Instead, they will be able to prepare Supplementary Plans, which will be afforded the same weight as a local plan or minerals and waste plan. The government proposes that, when the new system comes into force, existing SPDs will remain in force for a time-bound period; until the local planning authority is required to adopt a new style plan. Current SPDs will automatically cease to have effect at the point at which authorities are required to have a new-style plan in place.
- 3.26 On 30 July 2024, the new Government published its anticipated consultation which set out their approach to revising the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in order to achieve sustainable growth in England's planning system [BD7]. A key amendment is as follows:
- Plan-makers will have until 31 December 2026 ~~30 June 2025~~ to submit their local plans, neighbourhood plans, minerals and waste plans, and spatial development strategies for independent examination under the existing legal framework.
 - Transitional arrangements regarding Local Plans mean that as long as a Local Plan is at Regulation 19 stage one month after publication of the new NPPF, then the plan making process to adoption can continue under the old system.
- 3.27 The reason for the proposed changes to the NPPF as well as reform the planning system is because they have made clear that sustained economic growth is the only route to improving the prosperity of the country as well as the living standards of working people. The approach to deliver this growth will focus on three pillars: stability, investment and reform.
- 3.28 It is considered by Government that the December 2023 changes to the NPPF were disruptive to the sector and has been detrimental to housing supply. The reforms outlined in the consultation with the respect to the NPPF will take on

a more growth-focused approach. The proposed changes to the framework with an ambition to have universal and ambitious local plan coverage are vital in order to achieve economic growth and to be 1.5 million new homes.

- 3.29 On 12 December 2024, Government released the updated NPPF [BD8]. It promises significant changes to housing delivery, Green Belt planning, and Local Plan collaboration. The new NPPF takes immediate effect for all planning decisions, this includes all live planning applications which are yet to be determined by the Council.
- 3.30 For Local Plan making, there is a minimal transition period of three months from 12 December 2024 to 12 March 2025 whereby plans can proceed under the former NPPF (December 2023). However, the Local Plan must be at Regulation 19 pre-submission publication stage before 12 March 2025 and its draft housing requirement meets at least 80% of local housing need.
- 3.31 The intention of the above is to encourage Councils to prepare up-to-date Local Plans which have been prepared in accordance with the 2024 version of the NPPF.
- 3.32 Overall, the key changes include:
- Flexibility in Housing Plans: Local councils now have more discretion in determining housing requirements. The standard method for calculating housing need is now states as an advisory point, enabling adjustments for local needs.
 - Green Belt Safeguards: Councils are not obliged to amend Green Belt boundaries purely to meet housing targets, providing greater local control over these spaces.
 - Support for diverse housing: New measures to promote small-scale developments, community-led projects, and provisions for retirement housing, reflecting a commitment to housing stock and accessibility.
 - Focus on sustainability: Stronger emphasis on low-carbon, energy-efficient building adaptations to align with climate goals, including protections for heritage assets.

Local Plan – Partial Review and Update

- 3.33 In June 2024, Cabinet [BD9] approved the Local Plan – Partial Review and Update for the first round of public consultation under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
- 3.34 Officers reported back to Cabinet on 13 November 2024 [BD10], feeding back on the Regulation 18 consultation and gained approval for the second round of consultation on the Local Plan – Partial Review and Update, the Regulation 19 version. This is currently out to public consultation until 14 February 2025 (extended from the original end date of 29 January 2025).
- 3.35 Given that the Local Plan – Partial Review and Update is at Regulation 19 stage and the draft housing requirement meets in excess of 80% of local housing need, under the transitional arrangements outlined above, this means that the Local Plan – Partial Review and Update will be submitted and

examined under the previous NPPF 2023 and not the current NPPF 2024. This provides more certainty with regard to the need to update the Plan, which is now over 5 years old and as such progressing the revised Plan to adoption at an earlier stage would mean that policies carry greater weight in decision making.

- 3.36 The consequence of not falling under the transitional arrangements and instead operating under the NPPF 2024 would mean that we would need to prepare a new Plan from scratch, thus increasing the risk that policies in the 2019 Local Plan would lose weight in decision making over time, until the new Plan progressed to the first stage of consultation. By operating under the transitional arrangements and therefore under the NPPF 2023, we are working to a broad two-stage process:

1. Local Plan – Partial Review and Update (to be submitted and examined under the NPPF 2023)
2. New Local Plan (to be progressed under the NPPF 2024 or subsequent versions of the NPPF thereafter)

- 3.37 Officers have sought legal advice from Counsel on the broad approach and Counsel are content that we are following the most appropriate process. In addition, in January 2025 officers sought the advice of the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) who were also broadly satisfied that we are following the correct process, appropriate to our local circumstances.
- 3.38 Therefore, following the Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 rounds of consultation, the Local Plan – Partial Review and Update will then be submitted to the Secretary of State (MHCLG), ahead of an independent Examination in Public by an appointed Planning Inspector. The submission of the Plan is expected to be in Spring 2025 (this will be a date post-County Council Elections), following the conclusion of the Regulation 19 consultation.
- 3.39 A final consultation on any modifications proposed by the Inspector to the Plan is then held prior to the Inspector’s Report, which would confirm whether the Plan can proceed to formal adoption, i.e. it is deemed to be sound. Monitoring and review of the Plan would then be required for a period of time after the Plan has been adopted.
- 3.40 It is important for Cabinet to note and acknowledge that the key reason for the Council’s proposals to revise its existing SPDs is to ensure that the Council has a complete and up to date suite of Planning Policy documents, supporting the Local Plan – Partial Review and Update when the Local Plan – Partial Review and Update is submitted to the Secretary of State in 2025; and to ensure that we do not get caught under the new system, meaning that the existing SPDs run the risk of being out of date in regard to upcoming planning decisions and the risk of being superseded by Supplementary Plans under the latest NPPF.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

Recommendation 2.1: That Cabinet note the content of the three revised Stevenage Supplementary Planning Documents: Parking Provision SPD, Developer Contributions SPD and Design Guidance SPD; and note the public consultation on the three revised Supplementary Planning Documents, held between 14 October and 24 November 2024.

- 4.1 The current, adopted Stevenage Supplementary Planning Documents are attached to this Report as Background Documents BD2 to BD4.
- 4.2 The revised, final versions of each SPD are included as BD13 to BD15. This is accompanied, for each SPD, by a schedule of changes including justifications that provide reasons for each amendment made [BD16 to BD18].

Parking Provision SPD

- 4.3 Amendments to the Parking Provision & Sustainable Transport SPD, prior to public consultation, can be summarised as follows:
- Removal of “Sustainable Transport” from the title of the SPD, to reflect the fact that the sustainable transport elements of the existing Parking & Sustainable Transport SPD have either been moved to the revised Developer Contributions SPD, or are suitably covered by Hertfordshire County Council Highways guidance.
 - Sustainable transport contributions moved to Developer Contributions SPD.
 - General improvements to presentation – removing unnecessary justification text, etc.
 - Various clarifications on parking requirement calculation – when rounding should occur, what constitutes a bedroom, etc.
 - Disabled parking requirements clarified.
 - Electric Vehicle charging requirements removed – now covered by Building Regulations.

Developer Contributions SPD

- 4.4 Amendments to the Developer Contributions SPD, prior to public consultation, can be summarised as follows:
- Travel plan guidance clarified.
 - Car club, public transport voucher, etc. contributions added (from Parking Provision SPD)
 - New contributions towards cycle hire scheme.
 - Document now refers to the CIL annual inflation rate, which the Council is required to apply. This is for transparency and to allow developers to calculate their CIL charge ahead of development.
 - Introduction of developer contributions for Electric Car Clubs and the Cycle Hire Scheme, on large windfall and strategic sites. This is in addition to

collecting a CIL charge to reflect the Council's sustainable transport objectives.

- General updates to legislation and National Planning Policy.
- Affordable Housing updates, in line with the Local Plan – Partial Review and Update amendment on Part M of the Building Regulations.
- The 'Construction Employment Opportunities for Stevenage' section now applies more flexibility, should a developer be unable to fulfil the obligations regarding construction jobs and apprenticeships. This is to support small and medium-sized developers and to reflect instances whereby local businesses and quick construction developers are unable to fulfil obligation due to time constraints.
- Increase in payment for failure to meet local recruitment targets for apprenticeships, from £250 per apprenticeships to £500. This is to help cover the cost of the brokerage system to fill apprenticeship positions and encourage early engagement with Stevenage Works, to support the delivery of local apprenticeships.
- Further clarity on what the training fund can be used for.
- Monitoring Fee increase to reflect the ongoing costs of the brokerage system to fill apprenticeship positions – officers have carried out work to determine local authority monitoring fees across the board. The proposed fees are based on an approximate benchmark value of several CIL charging authorities.

Design Guidance SPD

4.5 Amendments to the Design Guidance SPD, prior to public consultation, can be summarised as follows:

- Design guide changed to tabular format.
- Clear distinction between mandatory requirements and optional best practice.
- Appendix 1 of the SPD (character assessments) has been deleted, as was too brief to be of real use and also out of date (2008).
- General improvements to presentation of Appendices 2 (shopfront guide) and 3 (residential extensions guide) – formatting, new drawings etc.

Public Consultation (14 October – 24 November 2024)

4.6 Public consultation on the three SPDs commenced on 14 October 2024 and closed on 24 November 2024, a period of 6 weeks.

4.7 Consultation methods for all three SPDs was undertaken in line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement [BD11]. This included:

- Consultees who had previously signed up to the planning consultation list were contacted by e-mail, or by post where no email address was provided.
- The consultation was hosted via the Planning Policy's "Commonplace" platform, which has been used successfully for a range of previous planning policy and related consultations.

- The consultation was advertised on the Council’s website home page and Planning Policy pages. It appeared on the Stevenage Borough Council social media pages and hard copies of the consultation documents were made available at the Council offices and town’s libraries.
- Representations were able to be submitted via the Council’s website and / or sent via e-mail to the Planning Policy team’s mailbox.

Public Consultation – Summary of Representations

- 4.8 The Council is required, for each SPD, to consider consultation responses and produce a “Consultation Statement” document stating the main issues raised by respondents, summarising how the issues have been addressed by the Council.
- 4.9 Officers have prepared a Consultation Statement relating to the public consultation exercise on the three SPDs [BD12]. A summary of the consultation is as follows:
- There was a total of 240 visitors to the Commonplace consultation platform.
 - There were 29 individual respondents, including organisations such as Hertfordshire County Council, Historic England and developers including Mace among other respondents.
 - There were 117 individual consultation comments, with 123 total contributions and comments (including agreements with draft revised wording).
- 4.10 The main topics raised, for each of the SPDs, during consultation can be summarised in the tables below:

Parking Provision SPD	
General Summary	<p>Generally positive with suggestions on areas to consider or amend. Positive comments but, comments suggested amending areas such as, clarification on terminology and to ensure sustainable travel options, such as cycling were not omitted from the SPD.</p> <p>Comments suggested updates to national guidance documents but a positive reaction to the style and format of the document.</p> <p>Some comments suggested elements for sustainable travel to be improved in the SPD.</p> <p>Overall, useful comments were received to help with the update of the SPD.</p>
Space Standards	<p>Some comments suggested clarification on car parking standards and what they mean. Comments highlighted that although some may understand standards for parking provision, clarification in the</p>

	<p>text was recommended to assist understanding of 0.5 parking spaces and how this is calculated.</p> <p>This has also included clarification for cycle parking standards, including introduction of a requirement for adapted cycle spaces and design standards to accompany them.</p>
Care homes	Comment was received on number of visitor parking spaces for Class C2 Care Homes.
Sustainable travel	Comments highlighted sustainable travel visions should be updated and ensure consistency throughout the document with any new evidential studies / technical papers.
Cycle parking	Comments have highlighted clarification around standards but also provision of visitor cycle parking in new developments. The type of cycle parking provision was also highlighted as an area to amend to encourage economical designs which are easy to use.
National / Regional Guidance	Comments highlighted that guidance and strategy references should be displayed clearly, and if necessary, latest version included where possible.

Developer Contributions SPD	
General Summary	<p>Generally positive with suggestions on areas to consider or amend. Positive comments were also received on how the SPD aims to mitigate development on areas such as the public realm, active travel projects and sport provision.</p> <p>Comments did highlight that although there were positive comments, there were a few reservations about how to ensure contributions are sought for education, housing and transport infrastructure.</p> <p>Many feel elements for sustainable travel and climate change mitigation are not a priority in the SPD.</p> <p>Overall, useful comments were received to help with the update of the SPD.</p>
Affordable Housing	<p>There were positive comments on how the SPD provides guidance on how affordable housing should be provided.</p> <p>Comments considered the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarification of terms – for example, rent means social not affordable rent; • Wheelchair housing and the potential need for bespoke works for these standards;

Health	<p>Comments were positive regarding the inclusion of health and the significant impact housing has on current infrastructure. Comments suggested that a close working relationship between all parties is essential to meet the demands of growth. It was also noted that developer contributions should not only be for GP surgeries but also mental health and community health clinics.</p> <p>Comments also suggested new processes which could aid developer contributions. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the level and type of demand generated by the proposal. • Work with the partners to understand the capacity of existing healthcare infrastructure and the likely impact of the proposals on healthcare infrastructure capacity in the locality. • Identify appropriate options to increase capacity to accommodate the additional service requirements and the associated capital costs of delivery. <p>Some comments have also highlighted recent appeal decisions and how this might impact future decisions.</p>
Sport / Open Space	Contextual updates to make sure the latest guidance is used for calculations in sport contributions and positive comments for off-setting contributions for Open Space, if it cannot be placed on site.
Transport	Comments suggested updates to rights of way and travel plans within the text.
Education	Comments have highlighted the change of circumstances for funding in education.
Climate Change / Air Quality	Comments highlighted that the Draft Developer Contribution SPD does not include information on improving air quality. Comments recommended including technical studies for climate change mitigation.

Design SPD	
General Summary	<p>Generally positive with suggestions on areas to consider or amend. Overall, comments viewed the simplification and format of the SPD as very good.</p> <p>Some comments highlighted the need to clarify some planning terms and to be clear in what we want from design.</p> <p>Comments suggested updates to illustrations as a helpful way to communicate ideas.</p> <p>Overall, useful comments were received to help with the update of the SPD.</p>
Housing and adaption	Ensure terminology is clear and remove ambiguous language.
Movement	Comments highlighted the need for rights of way to be recognised within the document.
Active Travel	Ensure active travel is included as part of overall design and the relevant guidance from outside the council is referenced accordingly.
Safety	Comments welcomed the guidance on safety and where areas are designed well, crime and the fear of crime can be reduced.
Environment	A number of comments were received for swift bricks and on design, including a proportionate number in developments.
Building design and character	<p>Comments highlighted the need for flexibility with building design. The guide should not stop innovation and creativity. Therefore, comments requested flexibility in the text to take account of this, as character from local areas will assist with the design process.</p> <p>There was also a recommendation for the inclusion of character areas (formerly Appendix 1) to support the guide in explaining to developers, homeowners, businesses and decision makers what makes Stevenage unique as a place. This would enable new development to understand and reinforce the positive local character of Stevenage's character and conservation areas in new design.</p>
Environment	Space for orchards and allotments are not mentioned in the document and comments suggested including as this could be a positive initiative for flats and house with small or no gardens.

Final changes to SPDs following consultation

- 4.11 Officers have taken all comments and views into account in a conscientious manner. This has helped to inform and shape the final version of the SPD being reported to Cabinet.
- 4.12 The main concepts and principles of the draft SPD have been maintained and brought forward into the final version of the SPD, considering a number of significant amendments suggested by respondents' comments.
- 4.13 A complete schedule of consultation responses, the Council's response to the comments and the areas of changes proposed in the SPD are provided in the Consultation Statement [BD12].
- 4.14 Below is a summary of the final changes to each SPD, following the consultation period.

Parking Provision SPD – final changes since public consultation (BD13 & BD16)

- 4.15 Amendments to the Parking Provision & Sustainable Transport SPD, following public consultation, can be summarised as follows:
- Disabled car parking standards for residential development now based on number of wheelchair user dwellings or (for HMOs) accessible tenancy units rather than set as a percentage of total car parking provision.
 - Standards added for adapted cycle parking (e.g. recumbents).
 - Design criteria added for adapted cycle parking spaces.
 - Various minor changes to refer to more up-to-date evidence documents.

Developer Contributions SPD – final changes since public consultation (BD14 & BD17)

- 4.16 Amendments to the Developer Contributions SPD, following public consultation, can be summarised as follows:
- General minor changes including change of textual references administrative changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, updated Planning Practice Guidance, and the Community Infrastructure Regulation 2010 (as amended).
 - Amended paragraph to reflect proposed CIL Draft Charging Schedule and the introduction of a new charge on industrial development (note: the CIL Draft Charging Schedule is out to public consultation from January to February 2025, ahead of Submission to the Secretary of State for Public Examination and likely Adoption in Autumn 2025; the SPD reflects the current CIL rate as of 2020 and notes the likely adopted new CIL rates as of 2025).
 - Amended wording to provide clear notification of the requirement to apply an annual updated index inflation on CIL.
 - Amended paragraph to reflect education contributions as a whole and now references the Stevenage Cycle Hire Scheme to support the Council's sustainable transport objectives.

- Amended paragraph to reflect the need for wheelchair user dwellings identified in the latest Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2023 and to reflect the proposed Local Plan Partial Review and Update.
- Updates to provide clearer wording on process for project bids.
- Clearer wording relating to if a developer is unable to fulfil obligations towards the Local Employment and Apprenticeships as set out in a Section 106 agreement, due to time constraints.
- General changes to ongoing costs of the brokerage system to fill apprenticeship positions, administrative fees, monitoring and allocation of Local Training Funds.

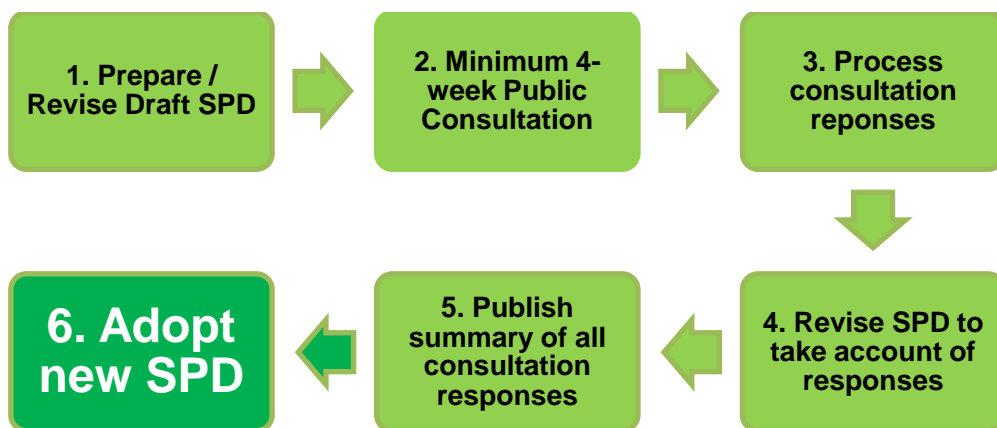
Design Guidance SPD – final changes since public consultation (BD15 & BD18)

4.17 Amendments to the Design Guidance SPD, following public consultation, can be summarised as follows:

- Various minor changes to refer to more up-to-date evidence documents and other relevant guidance.
- Various minor changes to provide clarity and correct typos.

Recommendation 2.2: That Cabinet approve adoption of the three revised Supplementary Planning Documents: Parking Provision SPD, Developer Contributions SPD and Design Guidance SPD, from 28 February 2025.

4.18 The procedure to adopt an SPD is set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. In summary, it is as follows:



4.19 The Council has undertaken a round of public consultation and the Council has considered the consultation responses, produced a document stating the main issues raised by respondents, and summarised how the issues have been addressed by the Council [BD12].

- 4.20 The Council is required, for each SPD, to produce an Adoption Statement, to notify the public of the adoption of each SPD.
- 4.21 The Adoption Statements for each SPD are attached to this Report as Appendix A, B and C.
- 4.22 The three SPDs are now ready to be finalised and adopted on 28 February 2025.
- 4.23 The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government will be forwarded the three final adoption statements, following adoption of the three SPDs.

Recommendation 2.3: That Cabinet agree that delegated powers be granted to the Interim Assistant Director: Planning and Regulation, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance, to make minor amendments as necessary in the final preparation of the SPD documents prior to public consultation.

- 4.24 The Supplementary Planning Documents are appended to this report. However, it may be necessary to make minor changes prior to going out to public consultation. This might include cosmetic adjustments, the correction of typographical errors and any minor factual changes.
- 4.25 It is recommended that any such amendments be approved via delegated powers.

Recommendation 2.4: That Cabinet note that the comments of the Planning & Development Committee will be sought and fed back to Cabinet.

- 4.26 The Planning & Development Committee, via the Chair and Vice Chair, have been circulated this Cabinet Report in advance of the Cabinet meeting.
- 4.27 Any feedback from Planning & Development Committee Members will be taken into consideration in the Cabinet's approval of this Report's recommendations.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 The costs associated with producing the revised Stevenage Supplementary Planning Documents will be met from the agreed departmental budget.
- 5.2 Any potential schemes that are mentioned in the SPDs will need to be subject to a business case and / or will require third party funding.

Legal Implications

- 5.3 Consultation on the revised Supplementary Planning Documents was undertaken in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
- 5.4 The outcomes of consultation were conscientiously considered in finalising the SPDs, taking responses into account prior to approval by Cabinet.

Risk Implications

- 5.5 It is important for Cabinet to note and acknowledge that the key reason for the Council's proposals to revise its existing SPDs is to ensure that the Council has a complete and up to date suite of Planning Policy documents, supporting the Local Plan – Partial Review and Update when the Local Plan – Partial Review and Update is submitted to the Secretary of State in 2025; and to ensure that we do not get caught under the new system, meaning that the existing SPDs run the risk of being out of date in regard to upcoming planning decisions and the risk of being superseded by Supplementary Plans under the latest NPPF.

Policy Implications

- 5.6 The revised Stevenage Supplementary Planning Documents accord with, and has been produced to supplement policies in, the adopted Stevenage Local Plan (2019) and emerging Local Plan – Partial Review and Update.

Planning Implications

- 5.7 The revised Stevenage Supplementary Planning Documents will supplement the adopted Stevenage Local Plan (2019) and emerging Local Plan – Partial Review and Update.
- 5.8 If adopted after consultation, the documents will not form part of the Development Plan for Stevenage. However, they will be a material consideration for planning applications.

Climate Change Implications

- 5.9 The revised Supplementary Planning Documents have the potential to have a positive impact on climate change through the multiple benefits that prioritising the design of development and incorporating innovative technologies.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.10 The revised Supplementary Planning Documents do not have any direct equality or diversity implications. When implementing any of the proposals the delivery body will need to consider the potential impacts on different community groups, particularly those who are less mobile or disabled.

Community Safety Implications

- 5.11 Whilst the revised Supplementary Planning Documents do not have any direct community safety implications itself, when implementing any proposals, the delivery body will need to consider potential impacts on community safety.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- BD1 Stevenage Borough Local Plan, 2011–2031
<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/planning-policy/stevenage-borough-local-plan/stevenage-borough-local-plan.pdf>
- BD2 Stevenage Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport Supplementary Planning Document (October 2020)
<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/planning-policy/planning-guidance/parking-provision-and-sustainable-transport-spd-2020-adopted-version-2020.pdf>
- BD3 Stevenage Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (March 2021) <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/planning-policy/planning-guidance/march-2021-updates-planning-guidance/sbc-developer-contributions-spd-march-2021.pdf>
- BD4 Stevenage Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document (January 2023) <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/planning-policy/stevenage-design-guide-spd-january-2023.pdf>
- BD5 Revocation Statement: The Impact of Development on Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (November 2024)
- BD6 National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>
- BD7 Proposed Reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the Planning System
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system>
- BD8 National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>
- BD9 Meeting of the Stevenage Borough Council Cabinet, Item 4: Local Plan Review and Local Development Scheme (June 2024)

<https://democracy.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/s36560/4%20Cabinet%20Report%20Local%20Plan%20Review%20LC%20Final%20230524.pdf>

- BD10 Meeting of the Stevenage Borough Council Cabinet, Item 4: Local Partial Review and Update: Regulation 18 Consultation Feedback and Regulation 19 Consultation (November 2024)
<https://democracy.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/s37640/4%20Cabinet%20Report%20Local%20Plan%20Review%20LC%20Final%20011124.pdf>
- BD11 Stevenage Statement of Community Involvement (June 2024)
<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/planning-policy/consultation-documents/reg-19-lp-consultation/statement-of-community-involvement.pdf>
- BD12 Supplementary Planning Documents: Consultation Statement (February 2025)
- BD13 Stevenage Parking Provision Supplementary Planning Document (February 2025)
- BD14 Stevenage Developer Contributions Guidance Supplementary Planning Document (February 2025)
- BD15 Stevenage Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document (February 2025)
- BD16 Stevenage Parking Provision Supplementary Planning Document: Schedule of Changes and Table of Justifications (February 2025)
- BD17 Stevenage Developer Contributions Guidance Supplementary Planning Document: Schedule of Changes and Table of Justifications (February 2025)
- BD18 Stevenage Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document: Schedule of Changes and Table of Justifications (February 2025)

APPENDICES

- A Stevenage Parking Provision Supplementary Planning Document: Adoption Statement (February 2025)
- B Stevenage Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document: Adoption Statement (February 2025)
- C Stevenage Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document: Adoption Statement (February 2025)

**Stevenage Borough Council:
Stevenage Parking Provision Supplementary Planning Document
Adoption Statement**

In accordance with Regulation 14 and 35 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) this Adoption Statement hereby gives notice that on 28 February 2025, Stevenage Borough Council adopted the Stevenage Borough Council Parking Provision Supplementary Planning Document as a Local Development Document.

The main purpose of the Parking Provision SPD is to provide standards that will be applied to new development within Stevenage Borough and will form a material consideration in planning decisions. They relate to all forms of development that are likely to generate demand for parking.

A draft copy of the SPD was subject to public consultation in line with Regulation 13 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

In accordance with Regulations 14 and 35 of the 2012 Regulations, and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations), the following documents have been made available:

- (i) The Stevenage Borough Council Parking Provision Supplementary Planning Document
- (ii) This Adoption Statement
- (iii) The Consultation Statement

These documents can be viewed on the Council's website at:

<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/planning-library>

and are available for inspection (free of charge) during normal opening hours at the following locations:

- Stevenage Borough Council Offices, Danestrete
- Stevenage Central Library, Southgate
- Old Town Library, 38 High Street

Any person aggrieved by the adoption of the SPD, may apply to the High Court for permission to apply for judicial review of that decision. Any such application must be made promptly and in any event not later than three months after the date on which the SPD was adopted.

For further information please contact the Planning Policy Team by email at:

planning.policy_SBC@stevenage.gov.uk

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**Stevenage Borough Council:
Stevenage Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document
Adoption Statement**

In accordance with Regulation 14 and 35 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) this Adoption Statement hereby gives notice that on 28 February 2025, Stevenage Borough Council adopted the Stevenage Borough Council Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document as a Local Development Document.

The main purpose of the Developer Contributions SPD is to set out the Council's proposed approach to the use of Section 106 (S106) agreements to secure developer contributions from new developments. This will assist planning officers, applicants, service providers, Councillors and members of the public through the planning application process, ensuring that the process is fair and transparent and is applied consistently.

A draft copy of the SPD was subject to public consultation in line with Regulation 13 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

In accordance with Regulations 14 and 35 of the 2012 Regulations, and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations), the following documents have been made available:

- (i) The Stevenage Borough Council Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document
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**Stevenage Borough Council:
Stevenage Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document
Adoption Statement**

In accordance with Regulation 14 and 35 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) this Adoption Statement hereby gives notice that on 28 February 2025, Stevenage Borough Council adopted the Stevenage Borough Council Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document as a Local Development Document.

The main purpose of the Design Guidance SPD is to set out clear design principles for all developments, from large residential schemes to the public realm initiatives and guide future development in Stevenage.

A draft copy of the SPD was subject to public consultation in line with Regulation 13 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

In accordance with Regulations 14 and 35 of the 2012 Regulations, and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SEA Regulations), the following documents have been made available:

- (i) The Stevenage Borough Council Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document
- (ii) This Adoption Statement
- (iii) The Consultation Statement

These documents can be viewed on the Council's website at:

<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/planning-library>

and are available for inspection (free of charge) during normal opening hours at the following locations:

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Any person aggrieved by the adoption of the SPD, may apply to the High Court for permission to apply for judicial review of that decision. Any such application must be made promptly and in any event not later than three months after the date on which the SPD was adopted.

For further information please contact the Planning Policy Team by email at:

planning.policy_SBC@stevenage.gov.uk

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Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Housing
Date 12th February 2025



DRAFT VULNERABILITY POLICY (HOUSING SERVICES) 2025-2027

AUTHORS: KERRY CLIFFORD
CONTRIBUTOR: SARAH PATEMAN, MATT GOUGH

LEAD OFFICER: KERRY CLIFFORD

KEY DECISION

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To present a draft Housing Service Vulnerability Policy 2025-2027 in line with good practice and the expectations from the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- 1.2 The Policy will ensure that the Council is compliant with legislation and has a clear focus on addressing vulnerability within housing services.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet note the duty placed on the Council under the Equality Act 2010, The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard and the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code for landlords to recognise and respond to vulnerability and to approve the Housing Services Vulnerability Policy at Appendix A.

- 2.2 That Cabinet recommends that the Vulnerability Policy is consulted on with tenants and prospective tenants for no less than four weeks and that following, the Strategic Director (RP), in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, be given delegated authority to approve the Policy and to implement minor updates and changes arising from new legislation or best practice.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council has a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them. However, the Council as a social landlord recognises that many tenants can be vulnerable for reasons other than the characteristics under the equalities legislation, and this policy sets out how the Council defines vulnerability and how as a landlord, it will respond to tenants' needs.
- 3.2 The Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard states that landlords **must take action to deliver fair and equitable outcomes for tenants and prospective tenants** and **must treat tenants and prospective tenants with fairness and respect**. Landlords should also consider how they can adapt their services and communications to meet individual tenants' needs.
- 3.3 The RSH Consumer Standards also require landlords to understand the diverse needs of tenants, including those arising from protected characteristics, language barriers and additional support needs. The importance of accessible and appropriate information and communication is also emphasised.
- 3.4 The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code provides that landlords should comply with the Equalities Act 2010 and may need to adapt normal policies, procedures and processes to accommodate an individual's needs as well as anticipate the need for reasonable adjustments.
- 3.5 In January 2024, the Housing Ombudsman published a spotlight report on attitudes, respects and rights, titled Relationships of Equals. The report focused on the meaning of vulnerability within social housing and how social landlords could better support the needs of those tenants and their households. It also emphasised the importance of a landlord's approach to customer vulnerabilities in being more flexible and agile, and able to adapt core services to better meet the needs of customers, without stigma or marginalisation.
- 3.6 The Housing Ombudsman Service defines vulnerability as, *"A dynamic state which arises from a combination of a resident's personal circumstances, characteristics and their housing complaint. Vulnerability may be exacerbated when a social landlord or the Housing Ombudsman Service does not act with appropriate levels of care when dealing with a resident's complaint... if effective reasonable adjustments have been put in place, the vulnerability may be reduced"*. This is the definition that has been adopted within the Policy.

3.7 There are several recommendations from the HOS spotlight report including the introduction of a new duty for agencies to co-operate to enable there to be easier communication to ultimately best support those considered vulnerable within social housing.

3.8 Specific recommendations for social landlords also include;

- A review of whether the Council is currently offering a 'human-centric' service provision.
- The implementation of a Vulnerability Policy, including how vulnerability is defined, who assesses vulnerability, and what the review process is. This must be in line with the Equality Act 2010, the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Care Act 2014.
- To test the policy in practice against the 3Rs – **recognise, respond** and appropriately **record** vulnerabilities.
- Implement a specific reasonable adjustments policy.
- Introduce minimum staff training requirements and training on customer care, mental health and learning disabilities.
- Ensure awareness and accessibility to the complaints' procedure – this is also highly relevant to ensure compliance with the Statutory Complaint Handling Code.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 The Housing Service Vulnerability Policy, sets out the Council's approach to ensure that all customers can easily access housing services, including support required to sustain their tenancy. The policy sets out clearly the approach taken by the Housing Service to 'recognise, record and respond' to customer vulnerability and will help the Council demonstrate how it will achieve the standards.

4.2 Analysis of the continuous recording of lettings and sales (a statutory data return providing a national information source referred to as CORE data), indicates that approximately 80% of new tenants housed by Stevenage Borough Council are considered vulnerable. There is also a higher-than-average number of older persons residing within Stevenage.

4.3 It is recognised that some new and existing tenants require additional support due to vulnerabilities, or specific challenges that are being experienced. In the summer, the Council updated its Tenancy Sustainment Policy to set out the approach to how support will be delivered in these circumstances.

4.4 All households that move into a Council property are assessed and their circumstances reviewed to ensure any vulnerabilities, complexities or special

circumstances are identified and recorded. This information is used to determine how services are delivered.

4.5 Where tenants contact the Council to report a repair or indicate through online reporting tools that there are circumstances that should be considered, the Council records and acts on this data. The Council also proactively captures any vulnerabilities or impairments through its Complaint Handling process and this helps to inform the approach to responding to complaints and any reasonable adjustments that should be considered for future service delivery.

4.6 The Council also gathers vulnerability and impairment information through day-to-day contact with tenants as well as a rolling programme of tenancy audits. The current tenancy audit programme has been developed utilising a range of information including that on residents' diverse needs along with consideration to arrears, repair reporting history and other appropriate information.

4.7 The Council records vulnerabilities on the Housing Management System and can flag key areas which include: -

- Hearing impairment
- Learning Impairment
- Mental/emotional distress
- Mobility Impairment
- Visual Impairment
- Wheelchair Impairment
- Requires Assistance with reading and writing
- English is not the first language

This information is then available to all system users and is highlighted and transferred into third party systems where visits are planned, and to allow information to be reviewed and updated as part of support visits, tenancy audits or other opportunities for details to be checked.

4.8 The delivery of this policy will be monitored on an ongoing basis, to allow service provision to be reviewed and areas for improvement to be identified. The effectiveness and outcomes of the policy will also be reviewed through feedback from sources where customer vulnerability information has been captured, such as via the Council's Complaints Handling Policy. This will be used to shape and steer the next review of the Policy.

4.9 This report recommends that Cabinet approves that the Vulnerability Policy is consulted on with tenants and prospective tenants for no less than four weeks and that the Strategic Director (RP), in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, be given delegated authority to approve the Policy and to make minor updates and changes arising from new legislation or best practice.

4.10 The Executive Housing Working Group has reviewed the Housing Service Vulnerability Policy and endorse the Policy and the recommendations.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

- 5.1.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report, however failure to identify and respond to vulnerability may have a consequence in terms of compensation payments from the HOS or through the Complaints Policy as well as not providing support to tenants who make not be able to access services, keep their homes in good repair or pay their rent.

5.2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.2.1 The Housing Service Vulnerability Policy will ensure the Council is compliant with the Consumer Regulations as set out by the Regulator of Social Housing as well as the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

5.3 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.3.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and can be seen at Appendix B. There are no negative equality, diversity and inclusion implications arising from the Vulnerability Policy.

5.4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.4.1 There are no direct significant risks to the Council in agreeing the recommendation(s). However, officers responsible for implementing any improvement activity set out within this report will need to consider any risk implications that arise.

5.5 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.5.1 The Council declared a climate change emergency in June 2019 with a resolution to work towards a target of achieving net zero emissions by 2030. There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report.

5.6 OTHER CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.6.1 The Council is at reputation risk if it does not comply with the Regulator for Social Housing's Consumer Standards'. The Council is also at reputation and financial risk if it does not comply with the HOS Complaint Handling Code.

6. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

[HOS Spotlight Report](#)

[Transparency Influence and Accountability Standard](#)

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Draft Housing Service Vulnerability Policy 2025-2027

Appendix B - Equality Impact Assessment

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Vulnerability Policy (Housing Service)

Stevenage Borough Council

2025 - 2027

Date created	November 2024
Approved by	Cabinet February 2025
Owner	Kerry Clifford, Assistant Director Housing and Neighbourhoods
Version	2
Author	Kerry Clifford, Assistant Director Housing and Neighbourhoods
Business Unit and Team	Housing and Neighbourhoods
Policy Review Date	October 2027
Equality Impact Assessment Date	January 2025

For translations, braille or large print versions of this document please email equalities@stevenage.gov.uk.

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) recognises that some residents may be vulnerable for a range of reasons and is committed to helping to meet their needs through the provision of suitable accommodation and appropriate, responsive landlord services.
- 1.2 We recognise that some residents will have a degree of vulnerability that may impact how they are able to manage their home or engage in their community and that a resident may become vulnerable over the course of their time with SBC.
- 1.3 Vulnerability can be a variable state and can occur at different points in a person's life. It can be temporary, periodic or recurring as well as on-going and there are a number of indicators that someone may be vulnerable or in need of individual support.
- 1.4 We are aware that the word 'vulnerable' can have limitations and stigma attached to it, however recognising that there is a need for staff, contractors and stakeholders to recognise vulnerable residents, we continue to use the word vulnerable as a universally understood term.
- 1.5 As a responsible social landlord, a key objective is to ensure that all customers have equal access to SBC services and that we identify, understand, and respond to our customers' particular needs in providing services and communicating with vulnerable customers, making flexible housing and support services available where we can, and supporting all people to thrive in their homes and communities. This policy outlines how we will;
 - Use available information and customer contact points to help identify vulnerabilities and establish the best course of action to meet their needs
 - Record details of vulnerabilities where it is appropriate to do so and highlight actions required on our housing management systems to ensure consistency of services
 - Record any known representatives who have authority to act on a customer's behalf including where a relevant Lasting Power of Attorney is in place
 - Adopt a personalised approach to ensure customers can access services in a way that works for them and their individual circumstances

- Refer customers to other council services and use onward referrals and signposting where appropriate Make safeguarding referrals in line with our safeguarding policy
 - Work with our tenants and leaseholders to identify service improvements to enable us to better meet the diverse needs of our customers
- 1.6** This policy supports the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy, the Reasonable Adjustments Policy, The Tenancy Sustainment Policy and the Council's Safeguarding Policies.

2. Scope

- 2.1** This policy applies to all residents living in properties owned by the Council and all prospective tenants. Council employees and contractors within the are responsible for ensuring that the policy is implemented effectively.
- 2.2** This policy provides guidance in relation to the consideration of vulnerability and sets out the general approach that SBC will adopt in relation to the provision of accommodation and services to customers who may be vulnerable.
- 2.3** The policy sets out our approach to partnership working with statutory and specialist services in relation to vulnerabilities. SBC recognise that we are not always best placed or sufficiently specialist to meet customer needs and will often need to work in effective partnership to respond to customer vulnerabilities.

3. Legal and Regulatory Framework

- 3.1** This policy sets out how the Council will comply with the requirements of the following:
- Social Housing (Regulations) Act 2023
 - Section 149 of the Public Sector Equality Duty
 - Equality Act 2010
 - Care Act 2014 & Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (as amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012)
 - Mental Capacity Act 2005

- 3.2** The Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards and Code of Practice state that landlords must take action to deliver fair and equitable outcomes for tenants and prospective tenants in the services they provide and should consider how they can adapt their services and communications to meet individual tenants' needs. They also expect landlords to understand the diverse needs of tenants, including those arising from protected characteristics, language barriers and additional support needs. The importance of accessible and appropriate information and communication is also emphasised.
- 3.3** The Housing Ombudsman has stressed the importance of a landlord's approach to customer vulnerabilities, including the need to recognise, adjust and respond to customers' individual circumstances. Landlords must be flexible and agile and able to adapt core services to better meet the needs of customers, without stigma or marginalisation. Effective communication is seen as critical in maintaining positive relationships, and landlords should move to a 'human centric' model of service provision.

4 Equalities

- 4.1** Under the Equality Act 2010 the Council has a legal duty to fulfil the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). Through this duty, the Council will carry out its functions in a way that:
- a) Removes discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010
 - b) Promotes equal opportunities between people who have a protected characteristic(s) and those who don't
 - c) Encourages good relations between people who have a protected characteristic(s) and those who don't
- 4.2** Further information on the Council's fulfilment of the PSED is set out in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy (2024) which is applicable to all employees of the Council, Councillors and contractors or suppliers who provide services on behalf of the Council.

5 Data Protection

- 5.1** The Council regards respect for the privacy of individuals and the lawful and careful treatment of personal information as very important to its successful operations and to maintaining confidence between the Council and those with

whom it carries out business. The Council will ensure that it treats personal information lawfully and proportionately as set out in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018.

- 5.2 The Council's principal aim is to ensure that all personal data processing carried out by the Council, or on its behalf, complies with the seven data protection principles and other key legislative requirements. For further information on the Council's approach to handling information please see [the Data Protection Act web page](#) at www.stevenage.gov.uk

6 Policy

- 6.1 Vulnerability can be defined as ***a dynamic state which can arise from a combination of a resident's individual circumstances, characteristics and external factors.*** Everyone experiences vulnerability differently; therefore, this policy outlines our person-centred approach to meeting the individual needs of our residents.
- 6.2 Vulnerability is not static; it can be permanent or temporary and is often multi-dimensional. No group of people is inherently vulnerable, it can occur at different points in a person's life, for instance for a temporary period following a bereavement, or it may be a permanent health condition which requires us to personalise our services in a specific way. Vulnerabilities may put someone at risk of harm, cause them to be unable to comply with the terms of their tenancy agreement or prohibit access our housing services.
- 6.3 We will aim to identify customers and potential customers who are or may later be more likely to become vulnerable. This will be achieved through a mix of capturing data on the commencement of service with us, tenancy audits and through ongoing contact customers have with us. We will use data to identify customers who may be struggling and when delivering a service and we will ask customers to share with us any vulnerabilities which they feel will impact the way we deliver that service and what reasonable adjustment they feel could help. We will capture this information including where a customer declines or identifies that no changes are required.

There may also be circumstances in which we will receive information from third parties, or from a family member or carer about a resident, and we understand that in some cases residents may not always understand or accept that they are vulnerable, but we will consider the information available to determine an appropriate response.

- 6.4 SBC will educate all staff and contractors to be aware of the possibility that a customer may be vulnerable e.g. from information they receive or following their own interactions with the customer during customer contact or working in a customer's home.

6.5 The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) recommends that landlords should consider the 3R's approach to vulnerability.

RECOGNISE – identify and understand customer vulnerability

REPOND – adopt a person-centred approach to meeting residents needs

RECORD. – keep accurate data of known vulnerabilities

6.5 Recognising Vulnerabilities

Employees will receive training to recognise potential signs of vulnerability such as:

- Being the perpetrator of antisocial behaviour due to mental health issues
- Being the victim of antisocial behaviour, harassment, domestic abuse or crime
- Hoarding, self-neglect or other behaviour which results in a person's home or garden becoming neglected or damaged
- Failing to maintain the conditions of tenancy such as regular rent payments

Employees will also receive additional training relevant to their role including:

- Safeguarding Training
- Equality and Diversity Training
- Mental Health Training
- Conflict Management Training

The Council uses different contact points to identify resident vulnerability including:

- Reviewing any support needs or vulnerabilities indicated in a Housing Application Form
- At the sign-up stage for a new tenant
- During home visits, rent discussions and tenancy audits
- Information provided by relatives, care givers and advocates
- Reports via external agencies e.g. support agency, police, fire service
- Observation through housing management activities e.g. a repairs operative raising a concern about a tenant following a visit to their home, or through assessments in our supported accommodation
- Proactively asking during contact for repairs and complaint handling. Other contact including phone contact, face to face visits and online interactions
- There is no single list of what would be considered to define vulnerability, however there are circumstances or factors which but the list in Appendix A can provide

some guidance on issues or instances when a person be considered as vulnerable and should be considered.

6.6 Responding to Vulnerability

We will embed in our way of working consideration of vulnerable residents' needs, abilities and circumstances in the delivery of our services and ensure they receive the required service, advice or assistance.

Where we do not have expertise relating to a particular vulnerability, we will work with suitable partner organisations to ensure that appropriate support is made available. We fully recognise the need to work with qualified professional services and we actively build and maintain links with these partners. We will support those with vulnerabilities to sustain their home and tenure when it is safe to do so, and their wish, by signposting and accessing support services from relevant local partners. We will always aim to seek a residents' consent before referring to a partner agency.

We ensure that we proactively attend and participate in key multi-agency meetings to ensure we have strong and relevant local connections. We will regularly attend multi-agency forums and where we have a particular concern relating to vulnerabilities, we may coordinate a multi-agency case conference, to ensure a coordinated community approach.

Reasonable Adjustments: Reasonable adjustment means a change to service provision which seeks to, as far as possible, remove any disadvantage faced by those with a protected characteristic or a vulnerability. Each of our service areas will consider any variation or adjustment that might be required and is appropriate in the circumstance to meet individual needs. This will vary by service, but some examples are:

- Allowing longer for a customer to answer the door
- Arranging a joint visit with a support worker/representative
- Having male/female only officers present when visiting or working in the home
- Visit in person to provide information or explain the content of a letter by telephone call
- Providing information in different formats
- Providing interpreting services

Representatives and Advocates: Residents can choose to appoint a relative, friend or other representative such as an advocate or local ward member to be able to speak to us and act on their behalf in relation to council services.

Lacking Capacity: If we are notified that a customer lacks capacity, then in line with the Mental Capacity Act 2005, we will liaise with those who have legal authority to act on their behalf.

Additional Support: Where a concern related to customer vulnerability is reported, a tenancy audit will be prioritised where appropriate. Home visits provide an opportunity for our housing officers to visit tenants at home to discuss any issues. During the visit housing officers will:

- Check tenant and household details
- Check that the home is safe and identify any repairs
- Provide advice and support to help tenants to manage their tenancy
- Make onward referrals to other agencies and services if needed
- Make safeguarding referrals if needed

Where someone is struggling to maintain their tenancy, they may be referred to our specialist support officers. This specialist team works with tenants with more complex needs. This includes those who have:

- Physical and mental health needs
- Learning difficulties and disabilities
- Difficulty in maintaining their tenancy (e.g. first tenancy or rent arrears)
- Experiencing domestic abuse
- Hoarding and property condition

6.7 Recording Vulnerabilities

SBC will record customer details on the customer record within our housing management and associated systems to enable us to meet individual needs. This includes any support, communication or access needs, and where anyone other than the tenant is authorised to speak to us on the tenant's behalf.

We will share relevant information across appropriate council services to support consistency of service. This is to ensure that when any contact with a customer is made, there is a record of the actions required to enable the member of staff to act accordingly to meet individual needs. We will work collaboratively with customers to ensure that the actions we take result in a positive outcome.

Safeguarding concerns will be raised in line with our Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults' policy and procedure which set out how we ensure that the relevant partner agencies such as social care are notified when we have a concern.

7 Consultation

- 7.1 This policy has been consulted on with the relevant teams within the Housing and Neighbourhoods Directorate and the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

8 Monitoring and Review

- 8.1 This policy will be reviewed by Head of Housing every 2 years or earlier if there is a change in legislation. Where more than 10% of the policy content is changed this will require sign-off from the Assistant Director and appropriate Portfolio Holder.
- 8.2 Any person who is dissatisfied with the way that the Council has implemented this policy or delivered services arising from this policy has the right to make a complaint. The Council's Complaints Policy and Procedure should be followed in this instance.

9 References and Resources

SBC Tenancy Sustainment Policy (2024)

SBC Reasonable Adjustments Policy (2024)

SBC Safeguarding Policy

10 Abbreviations and Definitions

EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
PSED	Public Sector Equality Duty
SBC	Stevenage Borough Council

11 Appendices

Appendix A – Factors in Defining Vulnerability

Appendix B – Vulnerability Policy Equality Impact Assessment 2024

12_Version History

Date	Outlined Amendments	Author
November 2024	Draft version 1	Kerry Clifford
January 2025	Draft version 2	Matt Gough

APPENDIX A

FACTORS IN DEFINING VULNERABILITY

The categories below do not list every possible factor as the whole spectrum of who could be regarded as vulnerable at any point in time is wide, but these are the more common factors to take into consideration when considering a customer's state of vulnerability.

Factor 1 Underlying characteristic (people in these groups may not always require additional support just because of this characteristic)

- Older people (particularly those 75 years or older)
- 16 – 21-year-olds
- Very young children and babies (particularly those 2 years old or under)
- Disabled people
- Care leavers
- Lone parents under 21 years old
- Refugees or asylum seekers
- Carers
- Families with disabled children
- Ex service personnel
- Those living with a terminal illness

Factor 2 Ability to act, engage and cope – (people may lack ability because of having one or more of these factors)

- Learning disability
- Mental illness
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Permanently impaired mobility or frailness
- Chronic, debilitating health conditions
- Addiction/serious substance or alcohol abuse
- Low level of literacy
- Low or no English language skills
- Age related conditions that impact on independent living

Factor 3 Exceptional life event (people may not have factors 1 and 2 but may have recently experienced an exceptional or traumatic event and so may be vulnerable at this

point in time)

- Recent history of street homelessness
- Recently moved from supported accommodation to independent living
- Bereavement following the death of a partner, child, or other close relationship
- Having recently left care as a young person
- Sexual or racist abuse or serious harassment or other hate crime
- Recent experience of domestic violence
- Living in or recently left a refuge or homeless persons' hostel
- Recently discharged from hospital or other institutional care
- Periods of sustained physical or mental illness at home
- Multiple debts and unable to meet basic needs e.g. fuel or food poverty
- Pregnant women
- Recently given birth, still born or miscarried
- Recently released from prison after a custodial sentence
- Families with children excluded from school
- Ex-service personnel returning from area of conflict

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Appendix B



Housing Services Vulnerability Policy 2025-2027

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) Form

[July 2024-July 2029]

Date created	January 2025
Approved by	Cabinet
Owner	Kerry Clifford
Version	1
Author	Kerry Clifford Assistant Director Housing & Neighbourhoods
Business Unit and Team	Housing & Neighbourhoods

Please [click this link](#) to find the EqIA guidance toolkit for support in completing the following form.

For translations, braille or large print versions of this document please email equalities@stevenage.gov.uk.

Does this policy, project, service, or other decision need an EqlA?

Title:	Housing Services Vulnerability Policy 2025-2027	
Please answer Yes or No to the following questions:		
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?		Yes
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?		No

Where a positive impact is likely, will this help to:	
Remove discrimination and harassment?	Yes
Promote equal opportunities?	Yes
Encourage good relations?	Yes

If you answered 'Yes' to one or more of the above questions you should carry out an EqlA.

Or 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 below and seek approval from your Assistant Director before confirming this by sending this page to equalities@stevenage.gov.uk.

I determine that no EqlA is needed to inform the decision on the .

Name of assessor:

Decision approved by:

Role: Assistant Director Housing & Neighbourhoods Role: Assistant Director

Date:

Date: 03/02/2025

Equality Impact Assessment Form

For a policy, project, strategy, staff or service change, or other decision that is new, changing or under review

What is being assessed?		Housing Services Vulnerability Policy 2025-2027			
Lead Assessor	Kerry Clifford			Assessment team	
Start date	Jan 25	End date	Jan 25		
When will the EqlA be reviewed? (Typically every 2 years)	Jan 2027				

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Who may be affected by the proposed project?	Housing applicants and housing tenants Council staff and contractors
What are the key aims of the proposed project?	To have in place a policy framework to ensure that Stevenage Borough Council is in line with good practice and the expectations from the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman Service and that Council staff and contractors can recognise, respond and record vulnerabilities and ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to service delivery where necessary and that tenants receive the help and support that they need to sustain their tenancies.

What positive measures are in place (if any) to help fulfil our legislative duties to:					
Remove discrimination & harassment	SBC is a third party reporting centre for hate crime / discrimination and actively encouraging more organisations to	Promote equal opportunities	The service priorities aim to promote equalities through partnership working to ensure that all Stevenage resident	Encourage good relations	Engagement with a wide range of residents, community safety partners and Housing Services. Developing

	sign up as third party reporting centres to reach the wider community.		have equal opportunity access services.		relationships with vulnerable/marginalised groups through targeted outreach.
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What sources of data / information are you using to inform your assessment?	<p>We have used data/information available both locally and nationally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of CORE data for the year preceding that identifies that approx. 80% of incoming tenants are considered vulnerable. • Information gained via tenancy audits and care plan reviews for those that consider themselves to have vulnerabilities, impairments, disabilities and complex challenges. • Review of vulnerability data that is captured during complaint handling processes. • Review of data relating to population increases with Hertfordshire 'Herts Insight' • Information published by the Housing Ombudsman service relating to complaint handling and vulnerability.
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In assessing the potential impact on people, are there any overall comments that you would like to make?	
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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:

Age

Positive impact	Yes	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	Any vulnerable applicant aged over 55 may benefit from the availability of Independent Living properties. The Council's independent Living team are committed to support residents within their own home to live independently and individual care plans are put in place to assess age related vulnerability. Housing Officers and tenancy sustainment officers support will record any age related vulnerabilities and ensure that reasonable adjustments are made and that reasonable aids and adaptations or suitable accommodation can be offered.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	Support is provided to those requiring aids and adaptations, through allocation of Independent Living and Sheltered Accommodation and through specialist support provision.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	Tenant profile data needs to be reviewed for older tenants and how many currently reside in general needs housing stock compared to sheltered accommodation.		

Disability e.g., physical impairment, mental ill health, learning difficulties, long-standing illness					
Positive impact	Yes	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	The Policy sets out how the Council will respond to vulnerabilities and how it will recognise, respond and record. By proactively asking tenants whether they consider themselves to have any disabilities or impairments that make them vulnerable, this has a positive impact on this protected characteristic.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	Upgrade housing management system to include more options for recording impairments and vulnerability that can be	

			segmented and reviewed to inform future service delivery.
--	--	--	---

Gender Reassignment					
Positive impact	None	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	We do not have any service data to show that there would be any impact on this group. Staff do have an awareness of this particular group and as with any other groups will ensure that no group is disadvantaged.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

Marriage or Civil Partnership					
Positive impact	None	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	We do not have and service data to show that there would be any impact on this group. Staff do have an awareness of this particular group, that domestic abuse can be a feature of some marital or civil partnerships and are trained t recognise and signpost to relevant services for support.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

Pregnancy & Maternity					
Positive impact	None	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None

Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	We do not have and service data to show that there would be any impact on this group. Staff do have an awareness of this particular group, that domestic abuse can be a feature of some marital or civil partnerships and are trained t recognise and signpost to relevant services for support.		
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	

Race					
Positive impact	None	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	This Policy will be for all those living within Stevenage, including BME groups. There is no evidence that shows that this group is disproportionately impacted by the Housing Service Vulnerability Policy, however hate crime is recorded and data is being compiled to ensure that residents who may struggle to interact with us because English is not their first language.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		Data analysis on languages spoken and where tenants need more support to access services in different languages.	

Religion or Belief					
Positive impact	None	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	The Housing Service does not have any service data to show that there would be any impact on this group.				

What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	
---	--	--	--

Sex					
Positive impact	None	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	The Housing Service does not have any service data to show that there would be any impact on this group.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)			

Sexual Orientation e.g., straight, lesbian / gay, bisexual					
Positive impact	None	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	The Housing Service does not have any service data to show that there would be any impact on this group.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)			

Socio-economic¹

e.g., low income, unemployed, homelessness, caring responsibilities, access to internet, public transport users,
social value in procurement

Positive impact	Yes	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	The Council has access to rent arrears data, possibly indicating low income or financial hardship, which can often be exacerbated by vulnerabilities or complex challenges. The Vulnerability Policy will have a positive impact on these groups and tenants will be supported by officers to identify support options available.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

Additional Considerations

Please outline any other potential impact on people in any other contexts

Positive impact	Yes	Negative impact	None	Unequal impact	None
Please evidence the data and 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)		

¹Although 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.

Consultation Findings

Document any feedback gained from the following groups of people:

Staff?	Staff have been encouraged to feedback on the Policy and it has also been recommended by the Executive Housing Working Group.	Residents?	The Policy will be consulted on prior to recommendations from Cabinet for the Strategic Director (RP) to approve the Policy, in consultation with the relevant portfolio holder. Consultation will be for a minimum of four weeks and will be undertaken by a mix of tenants and prospective tenants.
Voluntary & community sector?		Partners?	Partners agree that in order to make a difference it is essential that we work co-operatively, and information is shared regularly.
Other stakeholders?			

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Overall Conclusion & Future Activity

Explain the overall findings of the assessment and reasons for outcome (please choose one) :		
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	As below
	2b. Continue as planned	
	2c. Stop and remove	

Detail the **actions that are needed** as a result of this assessment and how they will help to **remove discrimination & harassment, promote equal opportunities** and / or **encourage good relations**:

Action	Will this help to remove, promote and / or encourage?	Responsible officer	Deadline	How will this be embedded as business as usual?
Data analysis on languages spoken and where tenants need more support to access services in different languages.	This will ensure that groups who may not have English with their first language are provided with interpretation and support to access services.	Head of Housing	December 2025	Will become part of the normal monitoring processes
Upgrade housing management system to include more options for recording impairments and vulnerability that can be segmented and reviewed to inform future service delivery.	Vulnerabilities will be clearly recorded and data can be used to shape services.	Corporate Transformation and Housing IT teams.	December 2025	Through Policy implementation and reviews.
Allocations Policy review to ensure that it does not discriminate against those in protected groups but also that may have had a criminal history.	Promote confidence in both staff members and the public that the correct decisions are made and do not direct or indirectly discriminate.	Housing Supply and Lettings Manager.	July 2025	Through Policy Implementation and reviews.

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Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director: Kerry Clifford

Date: Jan 2024

Please send this EqIA to equalities@stevenage.gov.uk for critical friend feedback and for final submittance with the associated project.

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