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Daneshill House
Danestrete
Stevenage
Hertfordshire

8 July 2025

Dear Sir/Madam

Notice is hereby given that a meeting of the Stevenage Borough Council will be held in the Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage on Wednesday, 16 July 2025 at 7.00pm and you are summoned to attend to transact the following business.

Yours faithfully

Tom Pike
Chief Executive

AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MINUTES - SPECIAL MEETING AND ANNUAL MEETING - 22 MAY 2025

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meetings of the Special Council and Annual Council held on 22 May 2025.

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3. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

To receive any communications that the Mayor may wish to put before the Council.

4. COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS

To receive a Presentation on Stevenage Works Skills Agenda.

5. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None received.

6. QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

None received.

7. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None received.

8. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

In accordance with the Council's Standing Orders, the Leader of the Opposition shall be given the opportunity to raise one matter relevant to the Borough that has arisen since the last meeting of the Council. The Leader of the Council shall then have the opportunity to advise the Council of matters relevant to the Borough that have arisen since the last meeting.

9. UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS

To receive updates from the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees on the recent activities of those Committees.

10. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

To consider the Annual Scrutiny Report 2024/25.

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11. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

In accordance with Standing Orders, the following motions have been received for consideration:

(1) Celebrating the Success of Stevenage Works in Delivering Social Value and Opportunity

To be moved by Councillor Loraine Rossati

This Council notes that:

- The creation of *Stevenage Works* in 2019 as a strategic partnership between Stevenage Borough Council, North Hertfordshire College, and Hertfordshire Job Centre Plus is delivering social value through inward investment, regeneration, and development projects across Stevenage.
- *Stevenage Works* has provided a single point of contact for employers and the community, streamlining access to jobs, apprenticeships, training, and work experience.
- Over 550 local people have attended training courses; more than 180 have achieved Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards; over 40 apprenticeships and 30+ employment outcomes have been delivered in the past year alone.
- Over £50,000 has been donated by *Stevenage Works* partners to support local community projects and good causes.
- The innovative use of Section 106 obligations to ensure developers and contractors contribute meaningfully to local employment and skills development is benefitting local people.

This Council further notes the Secretary of State's recently published priorities for Skills England (2025–26), dated 2 June, 2025, which emphasise the importance of understanding future skills needs, simplifying access to training, and co-creating solutions with local partners. *Stevenage Works* is already delivering on these national priorities by providing a single point of contact for employers and residents, aligning training with local labour market needs, and working in partnership with education providers and developers to deliver apprenticeships, work placements, and employment outcomes. As such, *Stevenage Works* stands as a model of how local authorities can lead in delivering the Government's skills agenda and ensuring that inward investment translates into real opportunity for local people.

This Council believes that:

- *Stevenage Works* is a model of best practice in how local authorities can work with partners to ensure that regeneration and investment deliver real, lasting benefits for residents.
- This initiative has played a vital role in ensuring that Stevenage people are equipped with the skills and opportunities to thrive in a changing economy.
- The planned expansion into the health and social care sector demonstrates the adaptability and forward-thinking nature of the programme.

This Council resolves to:

1. Celebrate the success of *Stevenage Works* and commend all partners involved for their commitment to social value and community benefit.
2. Promote *Stevenage Works* as a model of excellence in local government-led economic development and skills partnerships.
3. Support the continued development and expansion of *Stevenage Works*, including the upcoming pilot in the health and social care sector.
4. Ask the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Education, the Rt Hon. Bridget Phillipson, to highlight *Stevenage Works* as an example of effective local delivery of social value and invite her to visit Stevenage to see how we are delivering the Government's skills agenda.

(2) Trialling highways changes to Lytton Way

To be moved by the Liberal Democrat Group

This Council welcomes the exciting opportunities that the Stevenage Station Gateway offers by bringing the town closer together and ensuring more accessible travel between key business and shopping destinations across the Town.

Given the significant and permanent changes proposed to the layout of Lytton Way as part of the Station Gateway, this Council agrees to work constructively with the County Council, as the highways authority, to investigate the possibility of implementing a trial of a suitable timeframe, to mirror the proposed highways changes to Lytton Way in a non-permanent way, so that the impact of travel disruption can be fully analysed including

any traffic displacement that takes place before a more permanent solution is implemented which will be difficult and expensive to reverse.

12. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO CHAIRS/PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

In accordance with Standing Orders, written answers to the following questions will be circulated on a supplementary agenda.

(A) Question from Councillor Phil Bibby

Is the Major Refurbishment programme running on schedule and within budget?

(B) Question from Councillor Peter Wilkins

The town has had no Beryl bike from 24th April to 30th June, over two months. Can you advise what financial losses or expense SBC has incurred while the bikes were recalled and if there is any provision in the contract to claw back some of these losses from Beryl?

(C) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

What consideration has been given to the viability of current Stevenage Town Centre regeneration plans due to impending local government reorganisation?

(D) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth

Recognising that under the Environment Act 2021, local councils have a responsibility to help halt the decline seen nationally in biodiversity by a deadline of 2030; and that specifically bee numbers are in decline, what measures is the Council taking to halt this decline and work towards making our green spaces bee friendly, e.g. by eliminating the use of glyphosphates and other harmful chemicals, reviewing any current bee-friendly practices to see how they can be improved and pledging to make 'no-mow May' as widely as possible?

(E) Question from Councillor Julie Ashley-Wren

We are already receiving complaints from residents that the new bus interchange is not being properly cleaned and maintained and users feel unsafe at night. What assurances can the Council give that these aspects will be improved in the coming months?

(F) Question from Councillor Tom Wren

Considering that a number of destination retail stores have now left the town centre and relocated to Roaring Meg, what plans do the council have to improve public transport links between the town centre and other retail/leisure areas?

13. AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

To note the Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 3 June 2025.

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

SPECIAL COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 22 May 2025

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Jim Brown, (Mayor), Nazmin Chowdhury, (Deputy Mayor), Myla Arceno, Julie Ashley-Wren, Sandra Barr, Philip Bibby, Stephen Booth, Robert Boyle, Leanne Brady, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Kamal Choudhury, Forhad Chowdhury, Peter Clark, Coleen De Freitas, Alistair Gordon, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Mason Humberstone, Andy McGuinness, Sarah Mead, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Ellie Plater, Tom Plater, Ceara Roopchand, Simon Speller, Jeannette Thomas, Carolina Veres, Anne Wells, Peter Wilkins, Nigel Williams and Jade Woods

Start / End Start Time: 7.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.10pm

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

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Sandra Barr, Akin Elekolusi, Lynda Guy, Loraine Rossati, Tom Wren and Deputy Youth Mayor Frankie Duncan.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH**

The meeting had been convened to consider a Motion to confer the title of Freeman of the Borough on Baroness Taylor of Stevenage, OBE.

Councillor Richard Henry in moving the motion paid tribute to Baroness Taylor for her outstanding service to the town and advised that this was the highest award the Council could confer on an individual. He spoke of her 27 years' service including 16 as Leader of the Council before becoming a Baroness and subsequently a Government Minister in the last two years.

Councillor Jeanette Thomas formally seconded the Motion and stated that she could not think of a more deserving recipient of the honour.

Councillor Stephen Booth and Phil Bibby spoke in favour of the motion.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that in accordance with the provisions of Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council confers the title of Freeman of the Borough on Baroness Taylor of Stevenage OBE who has rendered

27 years eminent service as a Councillor, including 16 as the Council's Leader, selflessly dedicating herself to both the town and the Council.

Baroness Taylor's contributions at County, regional and national levels were recognised when she was asked to join the House of Lords in 2022, and she now holds the role of Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

CHAIR

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 22 May 2025

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Jim Brown (Mayor), Nazmin Chowdhury (Deputy Mayor), Myla Arceno, Julie Ashley-Wren, Philip Bibby, Stephen Booth, Robert Boyle, Leanne Brady, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Kamal Choudhury, Forhad Chowdhury, Nazmin Chowdhury, Peter Clark, Coleen De Freitas, Alistair Gordon, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Mason Humberstone, Andy McGuinness, Sarah Mead, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Ellie Plater, Tom Plater, Ceara Roopchand, Simon Speller, Jeannette Thomas, Carolina Veres, Anne Wells, Nigel Williams and Jade Woods

Start / End Start Time: 7.10pm
Time: End Time: 8.10pm

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

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Sandra Barr, Akin Elekolusi, Lynda Guy, Loraine Rossati, Tom Wren and Deputy Youth Mayor Frankie Duncan.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 22 FEBRUARY 2025**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 22 February 2025 be approved as a record and signed by the Mayor.

3 **ELECTION OF MAYOR**

The Mayor presented two Long Service Awards to Councillor Richard Henry and Councillor Simon Speller in recognition of their 30 years of service to the Town and the Council.

The Mayor then welcomed all Members, and he recounted some of the highlights of his year, which included the Multi Faith Gathering at the Grace Church, Sargam Stevenage Onam Festival (Kerala), his indoor garden party, the Mayor's Charity Ball and Ceilidh, and a number of Park Run events.

The Mayor then thanked his Mayoress, Penny Schenkel, his PA Tracey Frost and Member Services Officer Sheila Scrivens for their support throughout the year along with Hilary Spiers from the Arts Guild for her contribution to a number of his Mayoral

events.

The Mayor then asked for nominations for the Office of Mayor for 2025/26.

Councillor Richard Henry firstly thanked the Mayor and Mayoress for their successful year in Office. He then nominated Councillor Nazmin Chowdhury for the Office of Mayor. In nominating Councillor Chowdhury, Councillor Henry informed the Council that as well as being one of the younger Members of Council and having represented the Bedwell Ward since 2022, she also represented the Bangladeshi Muslim community, reflecting the diversity of the town. Since her election, Nazmin had been involved in community development, collaborating with many organisations including the Stevenage World Forum.

The nomination was seconded by Councillor Ellie Plater who was pleased to nominate her fellow Bedwell Ward Councillor as someone who truly embodied the spirit of Stevenage and was a valued member of the community, helping people navigate challenges, standing up for fairness and ensuring that voices were heard.

There being no other nominations, a vote was taken and it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Nazmin Chowdhury be elected as Mayor for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

Councillor Nazmin Chowdhury then made the statutory declaration of office.

The Mayor then announced that Kier Williams would be the Mayor's Consort for 2025/26.

The Mayor thanked the Council for her election and all his guests for their attendance at the meeting. She thanked the outgoing Mayor Councillor Jim Brown for his representation of the Town and also as a support and friend in her role as Deputy Mayor for the past year.

The Mayor thanked her fellow councillors, her family, friends and the people of Stevenage for the trust placed in her. She then gave an inaugural speech, including the announcement that her theme for the year was 'Growing Together, Building a Kinder Future' and that her chosen charities for the year were the Young Carers Crew and the Rotary of Stevenage Grange.

The Mayor advised Council that she would continue to promote equity, compssion and community partnership and looked forward to working with charities, schools, faith groups and businesses to make Stevenage stronger, fairer and more connected.

4 **ELECTION OF DEPUTY MAYOR**

The Mayor asked for nominations for the Office of Deputy Mayor for 2025/26.

Councillor Myla Arceno nominated Councillor Lloyd Briscoe. The nomination was seconded by Councillor Carolina Veres. In the nomination and seconding of Councillor Briscoe, he was described as a supportive colleague with a great spirit of

team working, exemplary judgement and with a deep understanding of the community.

There being no other nominations, a vote was taken and it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Lloyd Briscoe be appointed Deputy Mayor for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

Councillor Lloyd Briscoe then made the statutory declaration of office. The Deputy Mayor announced that Sarah Pattison would be his Deputy Mayoress for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

5 **APPOINTMENT OF YOUTH MAYOR**

The outgoing Youth Mayor, Lahaina Sutherland, in her speech thanked the Councillors, Officers, family and friends for their support over the year and said that it had been an honour to serve as the Youth Mayor of Stevenage. She outlined some of the highlights of her year in office including the 80th Anniversary D-Day Beacon Lighting, Stevenage Day, the Stevenage Together Awards and a STEM event at Knebworth House. Lahaina wished the incoming Youth Mayor and Deputy Youth Mayor every success in their new roles.

It was then moved by Councillor Coleen De Freitas, seconded by Councillor Lloyd Briscoe and **RESOLVED** that Charlotte Gregory be elected as Youth Mayor for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

Charlotte Gregory then signed the declaration of office. In her acceptance speech, the new Youth Mayor thanked the Youth Council for her election. She further thanked the outgoing Youth Mayor and outlined a number of initiatives including helping young people to obtain real world life skills such as budgeting, financial literacy and understanding democracy as areas she would focus on during her year in office. She then announced that Lilly-Mai Bennett-Gutteridge would be her Deputy Youth Mayor for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

6 **RESOLUTION TO EXTEND 6 MONTH RULE - SECTION 85 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

The Council considered a report in respect of an extension of the 6 month attendance rule – Section 85 local Government Act 1972 for Councillor Sandra Barr.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that Council agree, in accordance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972, to approve Councillor Barr's non-attendance at meetings for six months, until 22 November 2025, on the grounds of ill health, and that the Council's best wishes be conveyed to her.

7 **APPOINTMENT OF LEADERS AND DEPUTY LEADERS OF POLITICAL GROUPS ON THE COUNCIL**

The Chief Executive advised the Council that Councillors Richard Henry and Stephen Booth had been appointed as Leaders of the Labour and Co-operative and Liberal Democrat Groups respectively.

It was noted that Councillors Jeannette Thomas, and Andy McGuinness would be Deputy Leaders of the Labour and Co-operative, and Liberal Democrat Groups respectively.

8 **APPOINTMENT OF LEADER AND DEPUTY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION**

The Chief Executive advised that the Leader of the Opposition would be Councillor Stephen Booth and that Councillor Andy McGuinness would be his Deputy.

9 **CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES**

Council considered various matters relating to the Member level decision making structure of the Council and the Council's constitution for the forthcoming Municipal Year.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED**:

- 1 That the Terms of Reference, as detailed in the appendices to the report; and the size and political composition for the following bodies that form the non-Executive Member level decision making structure of the Council be approved subject to the rules of proportionality where appropriate for 100 Committee places where applicable (relevant Committees are identified thus*) -
 - Overview and Scrutiny Committee* (Appendix A) – 14 Members (11 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Group, 1 Conservative Member)
 - Community Select Committee* (Appendix B) – 10 Members (8 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members)
 - Environment and Economy Select Committee* (Appendix C) – 11 Members (9 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members)
 - Planning & Development Committee* (Appendix D) – 14 Members (12 Labour & Co-operative Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members)
 - Licensing Committee (Appendix E) – 14 Members (12 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members)
 - General Purposes Committee* (Appendix F) – 14 Members (12 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members)
 - Appointments Committee* (Appendix G) - 8 Members (7 Labour Members, 1 Liberal Democrat Members)
 - Standards Committee* (Appendix H) – 8 Members (6 Labour Members, 1 Liberal Democrat Member, 1 Conservative Member)
 - Audit Committee* (Appendix I) – 10 Members (8 Labour Members, 1 Liberal Democrat Member, 1 Conservative Member) + 1 Co-opted non-elected member

- Statement of Accounts Committee* (Appendix J) – 8 Members (7 Labour Members, 1 Liberal Democrat Member)
- Joint Consultative Committee* (Appendix K) – 3 Members (2 Labour Members, 1 Liberal Democrat Member)

* Indicates where those bodies covered by the rules of proportionality for the purposes of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups), Regulations 1990 – total Committee places being 100

2. The Housing Development and Regeneration Working Group be separated into two stand alone Working Groups
3. That the Borough Solicitor be authorised to make consequential amendments to the Constitution to reflect the proposal set out in Resolution 2 above.
4. That the membership of the Cabinet and the individual Portfolios, as set out below, be noted:

Councillor Richard Henry – Leader, Transforming Stevenage & Local Government Reorganisation

Councillor Jeannette Thomas – Deputy Leader, Resources & Performance

Councillor Loraine Rossati – Economy, Skills and Transport

Councillor Jackie Hollywell – Housing, Housing Development and Voids and Repairs

Councillor Simon Speller – Culture, Leisure and Wellbeing

Councillor Rob Broom – Environment

Councillor Coleen De Freitas – Equalities and Young People (Job Share)

Councillor Tom Plater – Stronger Communities (Job Share)

Councillor Myla Arceno – Neighbourhoods and Older people (Job Share)

Councillor Nigel Williams – Co-operative Council and Tenancy Involvement (Job Share)

3. That the various Cabinet bodies appointed by the Leader, detailed in Paragraph 4.4 of the report and the relevant Terms of Reference for each body set out in Appendix L to the report, be noted.
4. That the dates for Council meetings for the Municipal Year 2025/26, as shown at Paragraph 4.7 of the report, be approved, and that the calendar of formal meetings shown at Appendix M to the report, be noted.
5. That the appointment of Richard Protheroe, Deputy Chief Executive, as Deputy Electoral Registration Officer be approved.

10 **CONSTITUTION REVIEW - PHASE 1**

The Council considered a report in respect of Phase 1 of the review of the Council's Constitution.

It was moved, seconded and **RESOLVED** that:

1. That the proposed revisions to Part 1 Summary and Explanation of the Constitution as detailed in Appendix A be agreed and adopted.
2. That the proposed revisions to Part 2 the Articles as detailed in Appendix B be agreed and adopted.
3. That the proposed revision to Part 3 Responsibility of Functions as details in Appendix C be agreed and adopted.
4. That the proposed revisions to the Community Presentation in Part 4 Rules of Procedure as detailed in Appendix D be agreed and adopted.
5. That the addition of a new Members' and Officers' Planning Code of Good Practice to Part 5 Codes and Protocols as set out in Appendix E be agreed and adopted.

11 **APPOINTMENT TO COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL**

Details of the individuals nominated to serve on each Committee, together with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of those Committees, where stated, had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Councillor Richard Henry moved and Councillor Jeannette Thomas seconded the appointment of Committees. Councillor Richard Henry moved and Councillor Jeannette Thomas seconded the appointment of Chairs and Vice-Chairs to the Committees.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- 1 That the membership of Committees, together with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs, where detailed, are appointed for 2025/26 Municipal Year as follows:

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 Members (11-2-1)

Councillors – J Brown (Chair), A McGuinness (Vice-Chair), S Barr, P Bibby, S Booth, R Boyle, L Brady, K Choudhury, P Clark, A Elekolusi, A Gordon, L Guy, M Humberstone and E Plater

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

10 Members (8-2-0):

Councillors – E Plater (Chair), J Ashley-Wren (Vice-Chair), L Brady, K Choudhury, A Elekolusi, L Guy, M Humberstone, S Mead, C Veres and P Wilkins

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

11 Members (9-2-0):

Councillors – L Brady (Chair), A McGuinness (Vice-Chair), R Boyle, J Brown, F Chowdhury, A Gordon, C Parris, C Roopchand, A Wells, P Wilkins and J Woods

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

14 Members (12-2-0)

Councillors – C Parris (Chair), C Veres (Vice-Chair), J Ashley-Wren, S Booth, R Boyle, K Choudhury, F Chowdhury, P Clark, C De Freitas, A Elekolusi, L Guy, E Plater, A Wells and N Williams

Substitutes - T Wren

+ 6 Labour substitutes (tba)

LICENSING COMMITTEE

14 Members (12-2-0)

Councillors – L Martin-Haugh (Chair), L Briscoe, P Clark, C De Freitas, A Gordon, L Guy, R Parker CC, C Parris, E Plater, T Plater, C Roopchand, C Veres, A Wells, T Wren

GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

14 Members (12-2-0)

Councillors – L Martin-Haugh (Chair), L Briscoe, P Clark, C De Freitas, A Gordon, L Guy, R Parker CC, C Parris, E Plater, T Plater, C Roopchand, C Veres, A Wells, T Wren

APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

8 Members (7-1-0)

Councillors – R Henry (Chair), S Booth, L Briscoe, L Martin-Haugh, L Rossati, S Speller, J Thomas and N Williams

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

8 Members (6-1-1)

Councillors – J Hollywell (Chair), M Arceno (Vice-Chair), P Bibby, R Broom, M Humberstone, L Rossati, J Woods and T Wren.

Independent Person who must be consulted on alleged breaches to the Code of Conduct – Dr. Robert Cawley

AUDIT COMMITTEE

10 Members (8-1-1) + 1 Independent Co-opted Member (S Uddin)

Councillors – C Veres (Chair), L Briscoe (Vice-Chair), P Bibby, R Boyle, L Brady, M Humberstone, T Plater, C Roopchand, A Wells and T Wren

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

8 Members (7-1-0)

Councillors – J Thomas (Chair), M Arceno, S Barr, L Brady, K Choudhury, F Chowdhury, L Martin-Haugh, R Parker, CC and S Speller.

JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

3 Members (2-1-0)

Councillors – J Hollywell (Employer Side Chair), J Brown and R Parker CC.

APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Council considered a list of individuals nominated to serve on Outside Bodies which

had been circulated before the meeting.

It was moved by Councillor Richard Henry, seconded by Councillor Jeannette Thomas and **RESOLVED** that the following individuals are appointed to represent the Council on the various bodies detailed below for one year, unless otherwise stated:

CO-OPERATIVE COUNCILS INNOVATION NETWORK – Portfolio Holder Co-operative Councils and Tenant Involvement

COUNCIL FOR THE PROTECTION OF RURAL ENGLAND: THE HERTFORDSHIRE SOCIETY - Portfolio Holder for Environment

DISTRICT COUNCILS NETWORK – The Leader of the Council

EAST COAST MAINLINE AUTHORITIES (ECMA) CONSORTIUM – Portfolio Holder for Economy Skills and Transport

EAST OF ENGLAND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION - The Leader of the Council

EAST OF ENGLAND REGIONAL PLANNING - Portfolio Holder for Environment

HERTS WASTE MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP - Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance

HERTFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD – The Leader of the Council

HERTFORDSHIRE INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING AND POLICY GROUP - Portfolio Holder for Environment

HERTFORDSHIRE LOCAL AUTHORITIES LEADERS GROUP - The Leader of the Council

HERTFORDSHIRE FUTURES – The Leader of the Council

HERTFORDSHIRE CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY PARTNERSHIP - Portfolio Holder for Environment

LEISURE PROGRAMME BOARD – Portfolio Holder Culture, Leisure and Wellbeing

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION - The Leader of the Council

SOSAFE PARTNERSHIP - Portfolio Holder Stronger Communities

STEVENAGE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP - Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities

STEVENAGE DEVELOPMENT BOARD - The Leader of the Council and Deputy Leader

UK INNOVATION CORRIDOR – The Leader of the Council

AGE CONCERN STEVENAGE – Jeannette Thomas

BEDWELL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION – Ellie Plater

CHELLS MANOR COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION - Andy McGuinness

CROSSROADS CARE – Anne Wells

DOUGLAS DRIVE SENIOR CITIZENS ASSOCIATION – Carolina Veres

HOME-START STEVENAGE – Coleen De Freitas

KADOMA LINK ASSOCIATION – Stephen Booth, Peter Clark and Alistair Gordon

LIVING ROOM PROJECT - Jackie Hollywell

OLD STEVENAGE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION – Nigel Williams

OVAL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION - Lloyd Briscoe

PIN GREEN COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION - Jeannette Thomas

SHEPHALL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION – Simon Speller

ST NICHOLAS COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION - Sandra Barr (Richard Henry and Claire Parris to cover)

STEVENAGE CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU – Rob Broom

STEVENAGE COMMUNITY TRUST – Jim Brown and Nigel Williams

STEVENAGE CREDIT UNION LIMITED – Carolina Veres

SPRUSE – Lin Martin-Haugh

HAVEN FIRST – Mason Humberstone

STEVENAGE/AUTUN/INGELHEIM ASSOCIATION – Loraine Rossati and Jeannette Thomas

STEVENAGE WORLD FORUM FOR ETHNIC COMMUNITIES – Kamal Choudhury and Forhad Chowdhury

SYMONDS GREEN COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION – Jackie Hollywell

TIMEBRIDGE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION – Tom Wren

HCC HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – Alistair Gordon

LOCAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION UNIT – Jim Brown

LUTON AIRPORT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE – Akin Elokolusi

CARERS CHAMPION – Forhad Chowdhury

DEMENTIA CHAMPION – Myla Arceno

MENTAL HEALTH – Lorraine Rossati

ARMED FORCES – Claire Parris

CHAIR

Part I – Release to Press



Meeting **COUNCIL**
Portfolio Area **ALL**
Date **16 JULY 2025**



ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT FOR 2024-25

Author – Stephen Weaver, Scrutiny Officer (on behalf of the Scrutiny Members) Ext.No. 2332

Lead Officer – Richard Protheroe, Deputy Chief Executive

Contact Officer – Stephen Weaver Ext.No. 2332

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To report on the work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Select Committees during the 2024/25 Municipal Year and to outline the Work Programme for the three Committees for 2025/26.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the work undertaken by Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Select Committees during 2024/25 and the Work Programmes for 2025/26 be noted.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, Overview and Scrutiny's role is to operate as an independent function of the Council's decision-making process, by having overview of the Council's decision making, holding the Executive to account, having the power to "call in" decisions for reconsideration and undertake internal and external scrutiny reviews.
- 3.2 The Council's Constitution requires that there be an annual report to Council on the scrutiny activity over the past Municipal Year (see Article 6.3 of the Constitution).
- 3.3 This report is largely a retrospective look at the scrutiny review work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the two Select Committees during the 2024-25 Municipal Year.

- 3.4 In accordance with the Constitution the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was also charged with scrutinising the Cabinet's proposals on Budget & Policy Framework items that go before Council for decision. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has an interest in resources, including human resources, communications, contract compliance and financial risk. In addition, the Committees considered updates on Scrutiny studies that had been undertaken previously, examining the progress of recommendations and where appropriate following up on matters raised.
- 3.5 The Committees have also worked with their relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holders on a number of separate policy development meetings developing policies and considering reports before their submission to the Cabinet.

4 SUMMARY OF SELECT COMMITTEE REVIEWS

- 4.1 Each Select Committee review made formal recommendations to the relevant Executive Member, Officers and external partners. The following is a summary of the outcomes of each scrutiny review.

4.2 COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

The Community Select Committee held 9 meetings during the 2024-25 Municipal Year. These meetings focused on the following substantive items:

13 June 2024 – (i) Housing Allocations Communications Plan (ii) Resident Engagement Strategy (iii) CSC Work Programme for 2024-25.

9 September 2024 – (i) Update on the work of the Neighbourhood Wardens (ii) Consideration of the Committee's Action Tracker.

4 November 2024 – (i) Performance of the new Leisure Contract (ii) Urgent item requesting update on Damp and Mould.

28 November 2024 – (i) Damp and Mould Update (ii) Housing Asset Management (iii) Housing Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

8 January 2025 – (i) Scoping document for review of Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (ii) Officer Presentation into ED&I and external input with the Protected Characteristic Groups for Race and LGBTQ+

29 January 2025 – Equalities Diversity & Inclusion review external input with the Protected Characteristic Groups for Age and Disability.

5 February 2025 – Aids and Adaptations Policy Development.

26 March 2025 – Crime & Disorder Committee.

8 April 2025 - CSC Draft Work Programme items for 2025-26.

4.2.1 Scrutiny of Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion

Commencing this review, the Community Select Committee met on 2 occasions during the municipal year to undertake the review on 8 January and 29 January 2025 and were supported by the following officers AD Housing & Neighbourhoods, Kerry Clifford, Corporate Policy and Performance Officer, Daryl Jedowski, Corporate Policy and Research Officer, Charlotte Bott, as well as the following contributors from a selection of the protected characteristic groups:

- Errol John, Equalities Commission Legacy Group, and Kate Belinis, Stevenage World Forum representing the protected characteristic group for Race.
- John Prebble, from Junction 7 Creatives & Co-co Brinda representing LGBTQ+ community and the protected characteristic group for Sexuality.
- Youth Mayor, Lahaina Sutherland and Deputy Youth Mayor, Deputy Youth Mayor, Frankie Duncan representing the protected characteristic group for Age (young people).
- Lorna Scardifield, Age Concern, representing the protected characteristic group for Age (older people).
- Mind in Mid Herts CEO, Sharn Tomlinson representing the protected characteristic group for Disability.
- Alison MacDougall, a volunteer for Hertfordshire Vision Loss representing disability protected characteristic group for Disability.
- Paula McGuinness a visually impaired resident and Herts Vision Loss member, representing disability protected characteristic group for Disability.

4.2.2 The review is not yet complete, in 2025-26 Municipal Year Members will consider the link to the Council Cultural Strategy to see if there is any alignment between the ED&I – strategy and the cultural strategy and then a draft and final report with recommendations will be considered by the Committee.

4.2.3 **Resident Engagement Strategy**

4.2.4 Members undertook some pre-scrutiny policy development of the Council's Resident Engagement Strategy ahead of the revised strategy being considered by the Cabinet at its meeting in July 2024 - [CSC 13 June 2024](#) . Members raised some challenge around the following issues:

- How would SBC demonstrate they were complying with the new Housing Regulation Act 2023 standards with no extra funding? It was acknowledged it would be difficult for the Council to do this, but officers would be focusing on demonstrating reasonable adjustments and show that the decision-making process is fair and transparent.
- How would expectations be managed? Members were informed that the most effective way to manage expectations regarding housing was to make service standards, procedures and policies as accessible as possible and easy to understand, by training staff to deal with and verbalise the decision-making process. Officers who have the most contact with residents, such as the repairs team or the Customer Service Centre, would need to fully understand the new legislative standards as well as service standards.
- Recruitment of people to a customer scrutiny panel with specific skills would be needed. Rotation of the chair or recruitment of a strong chair to keep the panel on topic would be important to stop the loudest voices dominating the discussions.

- Members were keen for the Council to build on its co-operative neighbourhood's approach by using neighbourhood wardens to reach out to those residents who don't use online methods of communication.

4.2.5 **Neighbourhood Wardens**

4.2.6 Members received a presentation updating them on the work of the Neighbourhood Wardens, this was an update on a previous session that the Committee has undertaken looking at the work of the wardens [Community Select Committee - Monday 9 September 2024](#) Members commented on the following issues:

- The priorities for the service over the next twelve months and how the team measured effectiveness within neighbourhoods? The priority is to change community meetings to copy the policing priorities meetings structure and move to a priority-based model. Regarding community cohesion, Officers shared this was a challenge to measure but was produced through engagement with the public using soft skills, making sure that all interactions were not a tick box exercise. Members suggested that they would like to be involved in the work produced by the Wardens. Officers agreed it would be useful for Members to attend drop-in sessions, church events, fly-tipping sites, and engage with residents at the towers.
- Members recognised that the Neighbourhood Wardens were doing a great job in the community, including the way they were dealing with graffiti and the work at the skate park was considered exceptional. The Chair suggested there was still work to do to streamline communication with Members in an efficient way with less publication of the same information in different formats, such as at walkabouts, drop-ins, online community meetings etc.

4.2.7 **Performance of the new Leisure Contract**

4.2.8 Members received a presentation updating them on the performance of the new Leisure Contract. Members were invited to consider a one-off update on the performance of the new Leisure contract after a full year of the leisure provider Everyone Active running the Council's leisure facilities. This incorporated input from the Council Client-Side Manager, SBC Culture, Wellbeing and Leisure Services Manager and from the contractor, Everyone Active Regional Manager. [Community Select Committee - Monday 4 November 2024](#) Members commented on the following issues:

- Welcomed the impact that Everyone Active had made in their first year of operating the new Leisure Contract with improved equipment and service
- Identified a need for improved communications with the public re what activities are available
- A request for more detailed year-on-year participation data to monitor improvements and assess service impact. Everyone Active committed to provide year-end data to establish a baseline for future reporting

- Work to address Gym Anxiety. Members asked Everyone Active to consider women-only or introductory classes to make the gym more accessible to women interested in strength training
- The Affordability of Swimming Lessons to families with more than 2 children
- Health and Socio-Economic Barriers - linking the town's socio-economic factors to poor health outcomes, highlighting the importance of accessible exercise options, such as outdoor gyms
- The Chair voiced concerns about a lack of public knowledge about diabetes and pre-diabetes and appealed for Everyone Active to launch an initiative focussed on diabetes education and prevention to address the significant prevalence of diabetes in Stevenage
- The Chair congratulated the team for winning a “Best Health and Wellbeing Initiative” award. Special recognition was given to the Health & Sport Strategy Manager

4.2.9 Update on Damp and Mould

4.2.10 Members received a presentation updating them on the position of damp and mould in SBC tenants’ homes, [Community Select Committee - 28 November 2024](#) this was an update on previous reviews that the Committee had undertaken. Members were provided with an update on the performance of the current service, which included:

- A target of 20 days for all building work order requests had been established
- For November 2024 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
- 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
- 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

4.2.11 Members commented on the following issues regarding the service:

- 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
- 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

4.2.12 Housing Asset Management

4.2.13 Members received a presentation updating them on Housing Asset Management, [Community Select Committee - 28 November 2024](#) outlining the key areas covered by the Service, which included:

- All programmes of works had been developed using stock intelligence gathered in consultation with residents and housing management as this was key to understanding the condition of the stock
- 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
- 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); and
 - Fencing Programme – Planned programme of over £1million this year
- Improvements relating to the voids service were reported including the procurement of support contractors as the service moved to a hybrid delivery model
- The Aids and Adaptations Policy was in the process of being reworked and following a discussion at the Committee, it was agreed that it should be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee for more targeted scrutiny

4.2.14 Pre-Scrutiny of the Housing Anti-Social Behaviour Policy

4.2.15 As a piece of pre-scrutiny, policy development work, Members received a presentation on the Housing Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, [Community Select Committee - 28 November 2024](#) outlining the key areas of the policy, which Members commented on:

- It was 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
- 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
- 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

4.2.11 Pre-scrutiny of the Aids and Adaptations Policy

4.2.8 The Committee received a presentation on the proposed changes to the Aids and Adaptations Policy. [Community Select Committee - 5 February 2025](#) outlining the key areas of the policy, which Members commented on:

- Members raised concerns about the reasons for refusal of adaptations and a perceived lack of transparency within the policy. They requested a detailed list of refusal criteria to be included
- Members were informed that decisions were decided on a case-by-case basis, allowing for individual assessments based on the tenant's needs and the suitability of the property
- Members discussed what the interpretation of 'reasonable' adaptations was, with Members seeking greater clarity on which types were more likely to be approved
- Members raised concerns that the policy did not fully consider tenants' disabilities when assessing under-occupation
- Members along with officers outlined the challenges faced within the Aids and Adaptations team, which included:
 - A backlog of cases due to resourcing issues, with recruitment efforts underway.
 - Budgetary pressures being managed through framework contracts.
 - IT systems under review to enhance efficiency.
 - Improved collaboration with HCC OTs and healthcare professionals to enhance service delivery.
 - Limited availability of suitable accommodation, downsizing incentives, and appropriate development properties to meet future needs.

4.2.10 Community Select Committee sitting as the Council Statutory Crime & Disorder Committee

4.2.11 At the Committee's Crime and Disorder focused meeting in March 2025, Members received a presentation on areas of interest that they had raised with the Police prior to the meeting regarding the following issues:

- What was the predominant crime in Stevenage?

- How confident were the police that people are comfortable in reporting crime?
- What actions had been taken/progress made by the police and the partnership, in terms of drug use in the town?
- Was anti-social behaviour still a problem for Stevenage? If so, were there hot spots, times of day, specific anti-social behaviours that are prevalent?
- Was cuckooing still a problem? What should vulnerable people do to protect themselves? What should they do if they fall victim to this? What do neighbours do if they notice strangers visiting a home in their street?
- How were the police connecting with our residents? Were the police attending resident meetings, councillor surgeries, community centres, schools, residential homes?
- Were the police being informed of safeguarding issues reported in schools - some statistics on this would be reassuring to know our young people are protected.
- Were the police satisfied with their ability to do preventative work on crime or do they feel the bulk of their work is reactive?
- How proactive were the police on uninsured drivers and untaxed cars? Some stats were requested.
- Was Stevenage going to see more PSCOs on the street?

4.2.12 Members were informed that during the past year the following incidents of crime were recorded for Stevenage:

- 7,233 crimes were recorded, representing an 8.7% increase from the previous year.
- Reductions were seen in specific crime categories including:
 - Shopping-related crime: 8% decrease
 - Residential burglary: 11.2% decrease
 - Vehicle crime: 36.9% decrease
- Violence Against the Person (including stalking and harassment) increased by 20%.
- Public Order Offences rose by 38.3%.
- Eight Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs) were issued.

Members asked further questions in relation to the following issues:

- the age profile of offenders
- the high levels of domestic abuse
- a question regarding accurate crime reporting. The Police encouraged the public to report incidents to facilitate data collection
- the Committee raised concerns about nuisance driving in Stevenage
- the nature of community engagements and the types of interactions involved
- Further discussion focused on drug possession and trafficking
- progress from the Build a Better Bedwell Project

- 4.2.13 For further details of the Police and Officer presentation and the Committee discussion follow the link to the meeting of the [Community Select Committee - Crime & Disorder Committee 26 March 2025](#)

4.3 **ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE**

- 4.3.1 Environment & Economy Select Committee: The Environment & Economy Select Committee held 8 meetings during the 2024-25 Municipal Year. [Environment & Economy Select Committee - SWB Website](#) These meetings focused on the following substantive items:

16 July 2024 – (i) Cabinet & External Partners response to Bus Scrutiny Review (ii) (iii) CSC Work Programme for 2024-25.

17 September 2024 – (i) Skills agenda interviews (Stevenage Works) (ii) Consideration of the Committee's Action Tracker.

8 October 2024 – (i) Skills Agenda interviews (Stevenage Children's Centre, Barnwell School, Youth Mayor) (ii) Update on Site Visit to North Herts College SITEC

12 November 2024 – (i) Climate Change Update

12 December 2024 – Input from Step-2-Skills re Skills Agenda review & draft Skills Agenda review report & recommendations

14 January 2025 – (i) Final Skills Agenda review report & recommendations (ii) E&E Select Committee Work Programme

27 February 2025 – Waste & Recycling.

11 March 2025 – Climate Change Update – Social Housing Decarbonisation.

4.3.2 **Skills Agenda**

The Committee met formally on 4 occasions in 2024 and informally with two site visits on 27 September and 18 October to undertake the review and received input from the following groups and people on the following dates:

- 16 July 2024 – draft scoping document and PowerPoint Presentation presented by Daryl Jedowski, SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager.
- 17 September 2024 – Interviews with Greta Gardiner, SBC Investment Project Support Manager who oversees the Stevenage Works programme, and Charlotte Blizzard-Welch, CEO of Stevenage Citizens Advice.
- 27 September 2024 – Site visit to North Herts College Science Innovation & Technology Centre (SITEC), with input from NH College CEO, Kit Davies, NH College Executive Director Corporate Services, Lizzie Jones and NH College Deputy Principal, Keith Turner.
- 8 October 2024 - Interviews with Theresa Kilworth, Barnardo's Children's Services), Jackie Johnson, Deputy Head at Barnwell Secondary School, Lahaina Sutherland, Stevenage Youth Mayor and Frankie Duncan, Stevenage Deputy Youth Mayor.

- 18 October 2024 - Site visit to Airbus, with input from Lucinda Williams, Jo Roberston, Head of Early Careers and Dave Ledger Senior Aerospace Engineer.
- 12 December 2024 – Interview with Matt Partridge, Deputy Chair of Step2Skills, the Hertfordshire County Council service that provides adult community learning and employment support service opportunities.

4.3.3 The review made recommendations on the following 10 areas:

- 4.3.4 **Recommendation 1 – (i) Expansion of Stevenage Works** - It is recommended that the Council be encouraged to expand Stevenage Works beyond construction into the health and social care sectors. **(ii) Expansion of Stevenage Works into “Green Construction” Solar and air source heat pump technology** - It is recommended that the Council be encouraged to expand Stevenage Works into a third iteration beyond health and social care sectors into Green Technologies.
- 4.3.5 **Recommendation 2 – Upskilling** - It is recommended that all partners including the DWP, Citizens Advice, Step2Skills, the Council and SMEs and larger employers should be encouraged to do this. Efforts from all partners would be needed to help lower skilled individuals obtain the skills they need to access higher skilled and higher paid roles which would directly tackle the problems associated with insecure employment from low-skilled, low-paid work, especially affecting a cohort of people aged in their late 20s to early 40s who still had decades left in the workforce.
- 4.3.6 **Recommendation 3 – Promotion of apprenticeships supporting nursery childcare into the local economy** - Apprenticeships in nursery childcare would both support parents in the local economy with the provision of more childcare and would support the apprentice to learn new skills and earn an income helping towards living costs whilst being trained. Members are aware that this is a national policy area which the Council can lobby on but has no direct control over.
- 4.3.7 **Recommendation 4 – Challenge to HCC & Local Children Centres regarding providing clear accessible information on what funding is available for families for childcare** – The funding position is currently confusing to parents so clarity would help in this area.
- 4.3.8 **Recommendation 5 – Promotion of work experience opportunities** - It is recommended that (i) the Council's Business Relationship Manager works with colleagues to promote opportunities for young people to connect with local employers for work experience; (ii) That SBC offers a range of work experience opportunities for young people across the organisation, and that these are offered consistently every year to local schools and colleges; and (iii) That SBC social media is used to share local job fares, open days, and work experience opportunities.
- 4.3.9 **Recommendation 6 – Promotion of success stories from Stevenage-** It is recommended that members and officers consider ways to promote success stories from the local community, celebrating successes by the college and schools where students show personal development or attain excellent skills outcomes, as they in turn become the role models for successive years of students, i.e. 'Mayors Award for Achievement'. This could be focused on those who have overcome challenges to achieve personal development, rather than focusing on the high academic achievers who traditionally already receive the recognition.
- 4.3.10 **Recommendation 7 – Promotion of a clear local careers advice service** (i) Work with partners towards a credible local careers advice service. Establishing a clear source of objective careers information which is available to pupils, students, and those wanting to re-train, or change direction. That a local link within the National Careers service is readily available, and that this reflects national standards in career

entry qualifications, but also what is available in Stevenage, and wider Hertfordshire; and (ii) Members proposed consideration of 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.

4.3.11 Recommendation 8 – Commendation to North Herts College and Barnwell

School for their work in promoting skills - It is recommended that North Herts College and Barnwell School be commended for their work to promote skills to their students (Noting that for context the review only interviewed these two academic institutions, but Members are aware of other good practice towards enhancing skills that is happening in the area). North Herts College by providing Industry standard facilities and equipment the college are equipping young people with the skills they need to move straight into higher level courses, apprenticeships or employment and are responding to what employers have been saying for some time that young entrants don't have the necessary skills to be work ready. Barnwell School are offering an excellent peer to peer mentoring to ready pupils for university applications and interviews as well as collaboration with the University of Hertfordshire through their "zero gravity" and "Brilliant Club" initiatives.

4.3.12 Recommendation 9 – Devolved, local skills strategy - 'One size fits all' solutions towards skills are ineffective. Localised strategies are better suited to address skill shortages. (i) That SBC along with its partners in the broadest sense (Herts Growth Board, Job Centre Plus, North Herts College, Local Secondary Schools, Local Employers) continue to work to develop and genuine, local skills strategy, which reflect local skills opportunities and challenges within the local economy; (ii) partners consider the provision of targeted support to engage those in insecure roles, providing a second-chance for those already in work but looking to transition to more fulfilling and secure career opportunities.

4.3.13 Recommendation 10 – Collaboration with Employers to Promote Employment Opportunities - The Council continues to engage and build on the widest possible cohort for opportunities, continuing to engage with employers in the aerospace and pharmaceutical industries and recruiters in Stevenage, to ensure high-skilled job opportunities are widely advertised and accessible to local residents. Many high-paid, high-skilled jobs are not visible to job seekers, as they are often gatekept by recruiters. The review proposes working with companies and recruiters to address this because collaboration with local businesses was essential to bridge the gap and increase awareness of available opportunities.

4.3.14 For further details of the final report and background to the recommendations follow the link to the [E&E Select Committee - Final Skills Agenda Report - 14 January 2025](#) & Minutes of this meeting which provide further commentary on the review - [Minutes - Skills Agenda Review 14 January 2025](#) and the Cabinet Member and External Partner response to the review is detailed in the link - [Cabinet Member & External Partner Response to Skills Agenda Review - 11 June 2025](#)

4.3.15 Climate Emergency update

4.3.16 The Select Committee received an update in November 2024 and again in March 2025 from the Executive Member for Environment, Councillor Simon Speller and the Head of Climate Action, Fabian Oyarzun and the AD Planning and Regulation, Zayd Al-Jawd. In November the Committee received an updated document detailing the latest position against the original review recommendations and a Stevenage Territorial Emissions Infographic; Biodiversity Action Plan Summary; BAP Neighbourhood Breakdown and a summary of the Climate Change Community Fund Projects - [Environment &](#)

[Economy Select Committee - Climate Change Update 12 November 2024](#). In March 2025 the Committee commented on a further update focused on actions the Council was taking to retrofit and decarbonise its housing stock - [E&E Select Committee - Social Housing Retrofit Decarbonisation Programme - 11 March 2025](#)

- 4.3.17 In addition to the formal review work undertaken by Environment and Economy Select Committee Members, selected Members and Officers supported the work of the Executive Portfolio Holder for Climate Change by contributing to 4 informal meetings of the Portfolio Holder's Climate Change Progress Group.

4.3.18 Waste & Recycling Service

- 4.3.19 The Committee received a presentation from officers regarding the challenges and potential changes with regards to the Council's Waste & Recycling Services. [E&E Select Committee - Waste & Recycling Service Presentation - 27 February 2025](#) Members commented on the service with a view to bring back a service review in 2025-26. Members comments and challenges towards Waste and recycling are detailed in the Minutes of the meeting - [E&E Select Committee Minutes - Waste & Recycling Service - 27 February 2025](#)

4.3.20 Pre-scrutiny policy development of the Tree and Woodland Strategy and the Green Spaces Strategy

- 4.3.21 The Committee received a presentation from officers on the two updated strategy documents. [E&E Select Committee - Tree & Woodland Strategy and Green Spaces Strategy Presentations - 20 March 2025](#) The session facilitated a discussion about the management of woodlands and green spaces, with an emphasis on community engagement and collaboration with stakeholders to enhance and maintain these areas, underscoring the importance of involving the community in the planning and management of green spaces and highlighting the benefits of collaborative efforts in achieving sustainable and effective outcomes. Details of the Committee's discussion and comment can be found by following the link to the Committee's meeting minutes - [E&E Select Committee - Minutes of Tree & Woodland Strategy and Green Spaces Strategy - 20 March 2025](#)

4.4 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 4.4.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 10 occasions to provide overview of the work of the Cabinet, specifically looking at all Key Decisions made by the Cabinet and all Budget and Policy Framework items. In addition to these meetings the Overview and Scrutiny Committee carried out its own work programme items:

4.4.2 ICT Update & Cyber Security

- 4.4.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as an agreed work programme item, received a presentation from the Assistant Director, Chief Technology Officer, Matt Canterford, updating scrutiny Members on ICT at the Council [O&S Committee - Officer Presentation on ICT - 10 October 2025](#). Following the presentation Members asked a series of questions with regards to; Councillors

questioned whether there were any efforts underway to assess our emissions related to IT usage, including hardware, software, storage, and cloud services. Additionally, what initiatives are being implemented to support SBC's goal of achieving net zero by 2030. It was stated that when moving systems into the cloud, it is challenging to record the true levels of carbon footprint. For further details of the presentation and minutes of the meeting follow the link to the [O&S Committee Minutes - Item 4 - Officer Presentation ICT - 10 October 2025](#)

4.4.4 Customer Service Centre Relocation

4.4.5 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as an agreed work programme item, received a presentation from Head of Customer and Digital Services, Greg Arends, updating scrutiny Members on how the relocation of the customer service centre had gone. [O&S Committee 20 November 2024 - Officer Presentation - Relocation of the Customer Service Centre](#) Members were informed that Customer service appointments now represented 10% of pre-pandemic levels, as online and remote processes had replaced in-person visits. However, housing-related services, lettings, and benefits remained significant reasons for face-to-face interactions. Around 30 unplanned visitors were seen daily, with common reasons including clarifications on council correspondence or non-council enquiries. For further details of the presentation and minutes of the meeting follow the link to the [O&S Committee Minutes 20 November 2024 - Customer Service Centre Relocation](#)

4.4.6 SBC Website

4.4.7 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as an agreed work programme item, received a presentation from Head of Customer and Digital Services, Greg Arends, updating scrutiny Members on use of the Council's Website. [O&S Committee - 17 December 2024 - Officer Presentation on the Council's Website](#) Members were informed that the website had undergone many advancements since it was first introduced over 30 years ago. The website had grown into a significant resource, now containing over 11 million words and more than 1,000 pages. Members provided a challenge to the accessibility and user friendliness of the current website and asked a series of questions and comments about possible future improvement of the website and these can be found by following the link to the minutes of the meeting [O&S Committee - Minutes of 17 December 2024 - SBC Website](#)

5.1 2025/2026 Scrutiny Work Programmes

5.1.1 The two Select Committees have agreed their Work Programmes for the year as follows:

5.2 Community Select Committee:

The Community Select Committee agreed to scrutinise the following issues:

- Progress of the new Housing Allocations Policy
- Tenant enforcement/ tenancy Audits
- One-off update item on Housing Damp & Mould regarding preparedness for the implications of Awaab's Law

- Continuation of the Equalities & Diversity scrutiny review
- Deep dive focus on Older People
- Community Centres - The Chair of the Committee to seek advice from the Strategic Director and Statutory Section 151 Officer and the Assistant Director Housing Development to discuss an update to the Committee on strategic plans
- Bring back an update on Sports & Leisure review and receive an update from Everyone Active & the Council's Health and Wellbeing Officer
- Statutory Crime & Disorder Committee
- Standing item on Public Health – with a view to work with HCC Public Health lead and partners including the Council's Health Scrutiny rep

5.3 Environment and Economy Select Committee:

The Environment & Economy Select Committee agreed to scrutinise the following issues:

- Main review - Refuse and Recycling with a focus on recycling in flat blocks
- Ongoing watching brief on the Climate Emergency – continue with 2 sessions during the year in Oct/Nov to coincide with the Annual Climate Change update to Council and in March to drill down on some specific measures
- Enforcement of fly-tipping
- Focus on Active Travel & Accessibility re Transport & the Public Realm
- Revisit review of Bus Services
- Update of the relocation of the Indoor Market
- Updates on the development of Green Space Strategies – Parks & Open Spaces (site visit to neighbouring offer at Stanborough Lakes in Welwyn)

The programmes above will be prioritised to ensure the key review activity takes place during the Municipal Year. As well as carrying out review work the Committee will also undertake any other pre-scrutiny Policy Development work as directed by the officer Strategic Leadership Team and the Council and Executive Forward Plan.

5.4 Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme:

5.4.1 In addition to undertaking all scrutiny of Budget & Policy Framework items and decisions of the Executive, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the capacity to undertake a "Select Committee" style meeting during the year if it so wishes. The Committee agreed to add the following items to its work programme:

- Corporate Complaints System – How do the new corporate systems link to Members enquiries and complaints?
- Pre-scrutiny Policy Development of the Council Tax Support Scheme linked to Universal Credit

5.4.2 Further one-off items are under consideration and will be looked at in more detail at the Overview & Scrutiny's meeting on 15 July 2025.

- 5.4.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will review the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions and also consider all 'Call-in' requests in accordance with the Council's Constitution. The Committee also considers any Councillors Call for Action in relation to matters relating to Resource. The Committee also considers any Petition appeals, in accordance with the Councils Petition Scheme, specifically regarding matters relating to Resources or of a Corporate or Council wide nature.

5.5 Scoping reviews

- 5.5.1 A schedule of generic dates for meetings for the two Select Committees has been arranged for the 2025-26 Municipal Year, as and when any further meetings are scheduled electronic diary invites will be sent to Members on the Committee. These meetings will incorporate the scoping of the review where Members will identify the areas they wish to cover during the review, who to interview, what evidence/background information is required and which Members will lead the questioning on a specific area, as well as undertaking site visits, where appropriate. Meetings will also be arranged to revisit previous reviews to monitor actions.

5.6 Pre-Scrutiny Policy Development Meetings

- 5.6.1 Pre-scrutiny Policy Development meetings will continue to be undertaken as and when directed by the Strategic Directors/Assistant Strategic Directors. These meetings are chaired by the relevant Overview & Scrutiny or Select Committee Chairs and the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holders are invited to attend.

4 **IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 **Financial Implications**

- 4.4.1 There are no financial implications for this report.

4.2 **Legal Implications**

- 4.2.1 There are no legal implications for this report.

4.3 **Climate Change Implications**

- 4.3.1 All Climate Change implications are addressed in paragraphs 4.3.15 to 4.3.17

5 **APPENDICES**

- 5.1 None

6. **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

- 6.1 Local Government Act 2000, Public Involvement in Heath Act 2007, Localism Act 2011, Overview & Scrutiny Statutory Guidance for Councils April 2024 - [Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities - GOV.UK](#)

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 3 June 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Carolina Veres (Chair), Lloyd Briscoe (Vice-Chair), Robert Boyle, Leanne Brady, Tom Plater, Ceara Roopchand and Tom Wren

Independent Member: Syed Uddin

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 6.50pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Phil Bibby and Mason Humberstone.

A declaration of interest was received from Cllr Roopchand who advised the Chair that the External Auditors, Azets, were a member of the Association of Business Recovery Professionals with whom Cllr Roopchand was employed in the capacity of Policy and Public Affairs Manager. Cllr Roopchand remained in the meeting during consideration of the External Audit Plan – Azets item.

2 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

At this juncture, the Chair welcomed Cllr Brady and the Assistant Director, Finance, both of whom were attending their first Stevenage Borough Council Audit Committee meeting.

The minutes of the Audit Committee held on 25 March 2025 were approved and signed by the Chair.

3 **EXTERNAL AUDIT PLAN - AZETS**

The External Auditors, Azets, presented the 2023/24 Auditor's Annual Report to the Committee.

The Committee heard that the Council was acknowledged as large and complex, with significant investment activity and a substantial Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The External Auditors advised that this complexity brought an inherently higher volume of risk compared to smaller, rural district councils.

The Committee were informed that no significant weaknesses were identified in the Council's arrangements and that Senior Management demonstrated a strong understanding of financial risks and appropriate responses.

The External Auditors commented that most risks identified were not due to deficiencies within the Council but were reflective of broader macroeconomic and systemic challenges faced across the local government sector.

The External Auditors highlighted the following areas:

Income Strip Scheme:

- Identified as complex, involving a subsidiary company.
- Acknowledged as underperforming from an accounting perspective.
- Management was aware and had taken steps to mitigate associated risks.

Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP):

- Discussions had been held on whether the calculated MRP, though correctly processed, met long-term resilience thresholds.
- The report recommended a reassessment of sufficiency, despite proper calculation.
- Plans to increase MRP were in place and reflected in the medium-term financial strategy.

The Committee were informed that, from 2024/25 onwards, auditors must report annually to members by 30th November, as required by the updated Code of Conduct. This would ensure more consistent and timely engagement, regardless of the audit's stage of completion.

The Chair invited the Strategic Director (CF) to address the Committee.

Addressing the MRP, the Strategic Director (CF) advised that the lower MRP percentage in 2023/24 was due to previous overpayments and a 2018/19 review of asset lives, which affected repayment profiles from 2025/26 onward - particularly linked to town square assets.

The Strategic Director (CF) added that £8 million of the debt related to town centre regeneration. The associated income was ring-fenced into a reserve used to fund MRP, ensuring no adverse impact on the General Fund.

The Committee heard that all debt was backed by income-generating assets, and the Council was confident that its position was not at risk.

Addressing the Income Strip Scheme, the Strategic Director (CF) advised the Committee that the scheme was designed as an enabler for wider regeneration and had triggered other investments (e.g., the Forum, Autolus).

The Strategic Director (CF) acknowledged that the asset had underperformed

relative to the business plan, due in part to wider challenges in the retail sector—this had already been reported to members.

The Strategic Director (CF) informed Members that the Council had not waited for the audit findings to initiate remedial actions:

- The Strategic Director (CF) had already written to LLP directors instructing them to implement mitigations.
- A Cabinet report due in September 2025 would present further actions being taken and would be brought to the Audit Committee at a future meeting.

The External Auditors, Azets, presented the 2024/25 Audit Plan to the Committee.

The External Auditor advised the Committee that, based on the auditors' assessment, there were no significant weaknesses in management oversight at either the operational or strategic level. This assurance supported the conclusion that management had effective control, irrespective of underlying risks.

The External Auditors outlined the key components of the 2024/25 Audit Plan and explained the application of materiality thresholds, with overall materiality set at 2% of gross expenditure, performance materiality at 65%, and a trivial threshold of £110,000, above which any errors would be reported.

The External Auditors identified several significant risks, including:

- Management override of controls, a mandatory risk under international auditing standards;
- Disclaimed prior year opinions, which prevent assurance over opening balances for 2024/25;
- Valuation risks, specifically around property, plant and equipment (PPE), council dwellings, investment properties, and pension liabilities due to the subjectivity of estimates and assumptions used;
- Complex transactions, notably the accounting treatment of the income strip;
- IFRS 16 implementation, where material impact was not expected but still under review.

Other areas of audit focus included the valuation of debtors, the Minimum Revenue Provision, and the Housing Revenue Account.

The Committee heard that full audit procedures would be undertaken for the Council as parent body, with tailored procedures for its subsidiaries (Queensway Properties LLP, Mashgate plc) and joint ventures.

The External Auditors detailed the "build back" approach necessary to recover from previous years' disclaimed audit opinions. This would involve a phased assurance process:

- Phase 1: Standard current-year audit work providing assurance over in-year activity;
- Phase 2: Targeted testing of key balances back to the last clean opinion;

- Phase 3: Retrospective work on historic reserves and CIS entries, subject to further discussion.

The External Auditors expanded on the audit fees, explaining that while core audit work was covered by the scale fee (including a 3.4% inflationary uplift), additional fees for build back work, IFRS 16 implementation, and disclaimed opinion-related activity were not included. He noted that the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) body was still reviewing appropriate funding levels, and the government had announced £49 million of additional funding to support councils with this work. A further £15 million had already been distributed to support fee increases to date.

The Chair invited the Strategic Director (CF) to address the Committee.

The Strategic Director (CF) commented on the ongoing challenges facing local authorities in relation to the complexity of statutory accounts. They noted that, despite previous national reviews and recommendations, such as the Redmond Review and assessments by the NAO and FRC, meaningful simplification had not yet been achieved.

The Strategic Director (CF) highlighted the resource implications of current accounting requirements, including the need for costly asset valuations, and questioned whether this represented best value for the taxpayer.

The Committee were advised that local authority accounts remained difficult to interpret and that delays in external audits had resulted in multiple audit years progressing simultaneously. As a result, some recommendations identified in the 2023/24 audit report might not be fully reflected in the near-final 2024/25 accounts.

The Strategic Director (CF) emphasised the significant pressures placed on a small technical team, which currently had two vacancies, and noted the potential risk to meeting the statutory publication deadline of 30 June. Appreciation was expressed to Officers for their work on the Statement of Accounts.

A Member asked whether the uncertainty surrounding future local government reorganisation (LGR), combined with current staffing constraints, was affecting the finance team's ability to manage ongoing and future work. The Strategic Director (CF) responded that the team was under significant pressure, as they were also responsible for capital monitoring, treasury management, and other technical tasks in addition to the closure of accounts.

The Strategic Director (CF) highlighted that the build-back process would be demanding, particularly as authorities prepared for LGR. The primary risk, they noted, lay in ensuring all accounts were closed and signed off before vesting day, to enable the new authority to have a sound financial foundation. This challenge was shared across all Hertfordshire authorities. The Strategic Director further remarked that although additional national funding had been announced, the local allocation was limited—approximately £26,000.

A Member asked a question regarding the risk of cyber-attacks. The Member emphasised the significant disruption and financial impact such incidents can cause,

drawing on experience from their own organisation. In response, the Strategic Director (CF) confirmed that the council had invested approximately £750,000 from Future Councils funding into strengthening cyber security.

The Strategic Director (CF) suggested that the Committee receive a cyber-security update from the Assistant Director (IT) at a future meeting following on from the previous ICT update received in November 2024.

The Committee noted the External Audit Plan 23/24 Report and 24/25 Plan.

4 **SIAS ANNUAL ASSURANCE STATEMENT AND INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2024/25**

Simon Martin, Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) presented the report.

Simon Martin summarised the purpose and scope of internal audit activity during the year and highlighted the inclusion of the new Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) in the reporting framework.

The Committee heard that the report provided an overview of service performance, quality assurance arrangements, and recent developments, including the expansion of SIAS's client base beyond Hertfordshire.

Members' attention was drawn to the Internal Audit Charter for 2025/26, which had been reviewed and updated to reflect changes required under the new standards, specifically amendments to paragraphs 6.1 and 6.3 concerning access rights and member oversight.

Simon Martin explained that while most of the report was for noting, members were asked to approve the Charter and to seek assurance from management that internal audit's scope and resources had not been unduly constrained during the year.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- The Annual Assurance Statement and Internal Audit Annual Report 2024/25 be noted.
- The results of the self-assessment required by the Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) and the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP) be noted.
- The SIAS Audit Charter 2025/26 be approved.
- Management assurance be sought that the scope and resources for internal audit were not subject to inappropriate limitations in 2024/25.

5 **2024/25 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT AND LOCAL CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer presented the report.

The Committee heard that the Local Code of Governance set out how the Council applied the CIPFA/SOLACE good governance principles to its local governance arrangements. The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer informed the Committee that the local Code of Corporate Governance was reviewed annually and underpinned the Annual Governance Statement.

The Committee heard that the revised document contained no major changes to the content. Most of the updates were to bring up to date the references to the Corporate Plan, which was launched in the previous year, and to update the use of Cabinet (as opposed to Executive).

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer advised the Committee that the Annual Governance Statement provided an assessment of the Council's governance arrangements. The Committee were advised that the statement built on the report considered at the previous meeting and was informed by the work of the Corporate Governance Group.

The Committee heard that the statement gave an overview of the concept and application of a governance framework and included a summary from the Shared Internal Audit Service and referenced the reasonable assurance opinion.

The statement looked at each of the seven principles and provided evidence of compliance and also provided an update on the previous year's actions. Actions identified for 2025/26 had been identified from the review of principles, assessment of strategic risks and feedback from audits and inspections.

The Corporate and Performance Officer informed the Committee that the statement contained three actions relate to housing, showing that as an area of focus.

The Committee heard that emerging themes that were likely to be more prevalent in the document next year included Local Government Reform along with the appointment of the new Chief Executive and subsequent changes to processes.

A Member commented that, in the revised Local Code of Corporate Governance, reference was made to Overview and Scrutiny Committee being recorded and available on YouTube which was no longer the case. Officers responded that Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings had previously been recorded and that the document would be updated to reflect that this practice had stopped.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- Members of the Audit Committee approve the changes to the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance (Appendix 1).
- Members of the Audit Committee recommend the Council's 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement (Appendix 2) for approval by the Statement of Accounts Committee.

6 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

7 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.

8 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer presented the report.

Members asked a number of questions that were answered by Officers.

The Committee noted the Strategic Risk Register report.

9 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR

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