

Public Document Pack

Daneshill House
Danestrete
Stevenage
Hertfordshire

Date of Publication

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, 17 December 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 - 15 OCTOBER AND SPECIAL MEETING 17 NOVEMBER 2025

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meetings of the Council on 15 October 2025 and Special Council held on 17 November 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

None received.

5. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

None received.

6. QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

None received.

7. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Question from Jennifer Huygen

With thanks to Cllr Simon Speller, Cllr Rob Broom and officers for keeping me personally in the loop on the progress of the pre-requisite works in Fairlands Valley Park.

In December 2023, the Council unanimously supported considering eco-friendly, wildlife-conscious lighting. The requisite bat survey, funded in the 2025/26 budget to remove the ecological barrier, is now complete.

However, the Green Spaces Strategy 2025-2035, developed following this vote, categorises this project (Action FV1) as 'Long Term (8-10 years)' to merely 'explore options'. This implies a delivery date of 2033-2035.

This timeline is now untenable given three key developments:

- National Policy: The Angiolini Inquiry Part 2 Report (published 2 December 2025) explicitly classifies 'better street lighting' as a critical preventative measure for violence against women and girls.
- Local Precedent: The Council's Community Safety Unit and Herts Police are currently consulting on a 'Safer Route' from the Old Town, explicitly stating that a 'well-lit route... enhances confidence and security for everyone, especially women and girls.'
- Community Demand: The 'Glow Ride' (October 2025) demonstrated active, physical demand for safer, lit cycling routes in the park.

It is also widely recognised, including in the Angiolini Inquiry, that violence and harassment in public spaces are significantly under-reported, and that many women and girls avoid unlit parks after dark, so recorded crime figures do not fully reflect the level of risk they experience.

Given this material change in national safety guidance, the completion of the bat survey, and the Council's own commitment to "Safer Routes" elsewhere in Stevenage, will the Council now bring forward and implement an accelerated, wildlife-conscious lighting scheme for Fairlands Valley Park by reclassifying Action FV1 from "Long Term" to "Short Term (1–3 years)", updating the wording to "Install wildlife-conscious lighting", allocating the necessary capital funding within the 2026/27 budget (ahead of the 12 February 2026 decision), and commencing design work immediately using the bat survey findings to mitigate wildlife disturbance while enhancing the confidence and security of everyone using the park, especially women and girls?

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. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

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

(1) Renters Rights Act 2025

To be moved by Councillor Jackie Hollywell

This Council welcomes the Renters' Rights Act 2025 — long-overdue reform that finally puts renters' rights first. The Act, coming into force in May 2026, ends “no-fault” Section 21 evictions, creates open-ended periodic tenancies, strengthens repair standards, and gives renters clearer routes to challenge unfair rent increases.

For the estimated 5,000 households who privately rent in Stevenage, this legislation means real security: no more being pushed out of their homes with two months' notice, no more landlords dodging their responsibilities, and no more uncertainty about the basics — safe homes, fair rents, and predictable tenancies. Since 1980, there has been a drastic reduction in the amount of social housing in Stevenage and the UK. A significant number of those homes are now owned by private landlords and the residents pay higher rents with fewer rights than they would have had as social housing tenants.

Labour councillors have consistently argued for these changes, and the Act finally delivers many of the reforms for which renters have waited years, including:

- Abolition of fixed-term assured shorthold tenancies (ASTs) and the move to periodic tenancies, giving renters more stability and choice.
- Stronger legal duties on landlords to maintain homes, tackle hazards and carry out timely repairs.
- Limits on advance rent and fees, so renters are not forced into financial insecurity simply to secure a home.
- A clear right to request pets, with landlords needing a good reason to refuse.
- New enforcement powers for councils — expanded civil penalties, better investigatory tools, and required reporting of enforcement activity.
- A national landlord database, improving transparency and helping councils tackle criminal and rogue landlords.

This Council resolves to:

1. Actively promote renters' new rights — making sure tenants know how to use them, how to report poor conditions, and how to challenge illegal behaviour.
2. Set clear expectations for landlords and letting agents, explaining their new duties under the Act and what full compliance looks like in Stevenage.
3. Strengthen the Council's enforcement capacity so that we are ready from day one to act against unlawful evictions, sub-standard homes and non-compliant landlords.
4. Write to the Minister for Housing, welcoming the introduction of long-overdue protections for renters, and suggesting that additional funding for councils will

be needed to do justice to this Act and achieve the Government's ambitions for renters.

5. Champion renters locally, ensuring that Stevenage leads the way in delivering a fairer, safer and more secure private rented sector.

(2) A Green Enterprise Partnership and Incentive Scheme in Stevenage.

To be moved by Councillor Wilkins

This Council notes that:

- Forward thinking local authorities throughout the UK are providing incentives and encouragement for local businesses to introduce innovative sustainability schemes in partnership with industry experts.
- Through this collaboration local businesses can reduce their environmental impact and reinvest savings in sustainability.
- Central to this success is the **GO GREEN scheme**, the UK's first green tax incentive for SMEs, funded by the Government's shared prosperity fund.

This Council believes that:

- Stevenage must take proactive steps to support local businesses in reducing carbon emissions to achieve net-zero targets.
- A scheme similar to the award-winning GO GREEN scheme introduced by Sutton Council would strengthen the local economy, encourage sustainable practices, and demonstrate leadership in environmental innovation.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. **Commission a report** into establishing a **Green Enterprise Partnership** in Stevenage, engaging with local business networks, sustainability organisations and strategic partners.
2. **Investigate the introduction of a GO GREEN-type incentive**, providing significant business rates relief to SMEs that commit to measurable carbon reduction plans.
3. **Develop a comprehensive roadmap** for supporting businesses in transitioning to sustainable operations, including access to expert advice, certification schemes and reinvestment opportunities.
4. **Report back to Full Council within six months** with findings, recommendations and an implementation plan for Stevenage's own Green Enterprise Partnership.

(3) Residents First: Protecting Family Homes and Community Cohesion in Stevenage

To be moved by Councillor Rob Henry

This Council notes that:

1. Residents have raised concerns about the use of hotels and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) within Stevenage to accommodate people arriving via irregular migration routes and other Government placement

- schemes.
2. The conversion of family homes into HMOs can place pressure on parking, waste services, community cohesion, anti-social behaviour management, and the supply of family housing across the town.
 3. Stevenage Borough Council has existing powers in relation to licensing, enforcement, and planning policy, including the ability to review and amend Article 4 Directions.

This Council believes:

1. Stevenage residents should receive clear information on how temporary accommodation is being used locally and the impact on services.
2. The Council should use its planning and housing powers to protect residential balance and prevent inappropriate HMO proliferation.

This Council resolves to:

1. Publish a quarterly summary, open and accessible to Members and residents, outlining:
 - The number of placements made into local hotels or HMOs via Home Office or other external schemes;
 - The general type of accommodation used (hotel, HMO, other);
 - Any direct costs to the Council or local services.
2. Write to the Home Office and other responsible agencies requesting routine, timely communication with the Council regarding local placements to support service planning.
3. Undertake a review of existing HMO licensing and enforcement, with the aim of:
 - Identifying unlicensed HMOs;
 - Ensuring compliance with safety, amenity and management standards.
4. Amend or expand Article 4 Directions where evidence shows:
 - A concentration of HMOs is affecting residential amenity, parking or local services;
 - Family housing stock is being reduced and community cohesion is or at risk of being impacted.
5. Update local planning guidance so that new HMO applications must clearly demonstrate:
 - Adequate room sizes and waste storage;
 - Sufficient parking provision;
 - Effective management arrangements.

11. 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 Peter Wilkins

What air quality monitoring systems are currently in place across Stevenage, how is the council using any data generated to control and manage pollution hot spots, especially around our schools and nurseries?

(B) Question from Councillor Phil Bibby

Does the Cabinet member consider that the level of compensation agreed for the period of stall holders being unable to trade, caused by the delay in relocating the Indoor Market, is sufficient?

(C) Question from Councillor Robin Parker

Has a suitable small mechanical sweeper now been obtained, if so when did it start being used, and what proportion of the borough has now been covered using it?

(D) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth

Can councillors please have a regular monthly summary statement of staff and employee movements and changes, including new postholder appointments and people leaving and joining the Council.

(E) Question from Councillor Tom Wren

When letting commercial property, what due diligence checks does the council undertake on prospective tenants to safeguard against properties being used for illegal activity or money laundering?"

(F) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

When can council leaseholders expect to receive final bills for the major refurbishment works? Please could the answer be broken down to include the years when work was completed and when final bills will be issued?

(G) Question from Councillor Rob Henry

Does the Leader agree that this council has a duty to be financially responsible and to keep our debt as low as possible?

(H) Question from Councillor Mason Humberstone

Does the Leader agree with me that community cohesion remains of paramount importance, and that it is increasingly at risk due to the rising number of illegal migrants arriving in our town?

12. MID YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2025/26 AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS

To update Members on the Treasury Management activities in 2025/26 and review effectiveness of the 2025/26 Treasury Management and Investment Strategy including the 2025/26 prudential and treasury indicators.

13. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS - UPDATE REPORT

To review the Committee Memberships on the Council.

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14. DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE EXECUTIVE UNDER THE SPECIAL URGENCY PROVISIONS OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES (EXECUTIVE ARRANGEMENTS) (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2012

To advise the Council of decision(s) taken by the Cabinet in accordance with the Special Urgency provisions of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

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15. 2026 FLEXIBLE VOTING PILOTS

To consider the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) invitation for applications from local authorities in England to pilot schemes at local elections in May 2026.

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16. AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 15 October 2025

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

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

Start / End Start Time: 7.00pm
Time: End Time: 10.05pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Sandra Barr, Peter Clark, Lin Martin-Haugh and Ellie Plater

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 16 JULY AND SPECIAL MEETING 24 JULY 2025

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Council Meeting on 16 July and the Special Council Meeting held on 24 July 2025 be approved as correct records and signed by the Mayor.

3 MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Mayor spoke about the recent terrible events at the Manchester Synagogue resulting in two people losing their lives. She welcomed the developments over the past week including the ceasefire and asked Council to stand for a moment of reflection of those who had been affected by the terrorist incident in Manchester and the situation in the middle east.

The Mayor then referred to a number of events she had attended since July which included:

- The signing of the Armed Forces Covenant in partnership with the Muster Point which reaffirmed the Council's promise to support the armed forces community both currently serving and also veterans and their families;

- National Sporting Champions event at Ridlings Athletic Track;
- Attending a dementia support group at Hampson Park;
- Herts Summer Parks Programme;
- Judging a schools recycling superhero competition;
- Fund raising event at Broom Barns School;
- Opening ceremony of the Knife Angel sculpture in Welwyn Garden City; and
- A book presentation at Stevenage Library.

Members made the following comments:

- As part of the wider Knife Angel programme, the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire were holding an art competition for young people under 25 and were encouraging schools and youth organisations ;
- The coffee morning at Broom Barns school had raised more than £900 for Macmillan;
- Members thanked the Mayor for the opportunity to remember the victims of the recent incident in Manchester.

4 **COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS**

There were no community presentations.

5 **PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS**

There were no petitions or deputations.

6 **QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL**

The Council received a question from the Youth Council regarding the proposed reduction in the voting age. The response to the question had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

There was no supplementary question.

7 **QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

There were no questions from the public.

8 **LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE**

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Stephen Booth, asked the following question:

Now that the County Council had started work on the Old Town High Street, businesses and their customers would be experiencing disruption and inconvenience with the loss of free parking well into 2026. Would the Leader of the Council consider offering free parking for the first half an hour in both the Primett Road and Church Lane car parks whilst the road works continued?

The Leader of the Council asked the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Skills and Transport to respond to Councillor Booth's question.

The Portfolio Holder advised that there were ongoing discussions with Herts County Council regarding possible contributions from them for the loss of income to ensure local taxpayers were not disadvantaged. The suggestion of thirty minutes free parking would impact the Council's income and impact other spend priorities across the town such as leisure. The Portfolio Holder suggested that the Leader of the Opposition speak to his Liberal Democrat County Council colleagues to request support on the issue.

The Council then received updates from the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holders on the following matters:

- Climate Change Community Fund;
- The New Leisure Centre and Carbon Footprint;
- Expansion of the Beryl Bike Scheme;
- STEM Opportunities in Stevenage;
- Tenancy Audits;
- Housing Development and Grant Funding;
- International Day of Older People;
- Co-operative Neighbourhoods Update;
- 16 Days of Action – Domestic Abuse;
- Flags;
- Bus Interchange Sculpture;
- 80th Anniversary of Stevenage;
- LGR Update.

9 UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS

Councillor Jim Brown, Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, provided updates for Council from the meetings held on 23 September and 14 October:

The September Meeting had reviewed Cabinet decisions from 17 September, including:

- Finance reports (Medium Term Financial Strategy, Revenue & Capital Monitoring, Treasury Management)
- Corporate Performance Q1
- Taxi Rank Revocation (Danestrete)
- Grenfell Inquiry Phase 2
- Social Housing Warm Homes Contract (Part II)

Key discussions at the meeting included the Fair Funding Review and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), concerns about funding distribution and impact on Stevenage and Taxi Rank safety issues due to construction development.

The October Meeting had reviewed Cabinet decisions on:

- Fees and charges (2026/27) for General Fund, HRA, retail seating, planning, and taxi tariffs
- Climate Change Strategy Annual Update
- Rent setting and service charge policy (2025–2027)

Restricted items considered included Commercial opportunities, sports & leisure centre, regeneration, wholly owned companies, land & development and there was an upcoming discussion on LGR at the November meeting.

In the absence of the Chair of the Community Select Committee, Councillor Leanne Brady advised that the Committee had met in September and had received an update on Damp and Mould in Stevenage Council Housing and also on Tenant Enforcement and Tenancy Audits.

In relation to Damp and Mould case statistics, Members had been informed that from April to July 2025 97% of all cases raised had been completed, with 89% of these completed within the 10 working days.

Members were also brought up to date on the preparations that the Council was making to be compliant with Awaab's Law which comes into force in October 2025.

Councillor Leanne Brady, Chair of the Environment & Economy Select Committee then gave an update on the work of that Committee. She advised that a presentation had been received from Stevenage Direct Services Officers regarding the challenges of providing recycling in the Council's low rise flat blocks. Challenges included limited space available for bin storage in older blocks, the difficulties posed by stair access, and the impact of poor signage and contamination on recycling levels.

Members welcomed the use of an SBC designed three wheeled bin for use by staff and a number of possible recommendations for the review were identified:

- Promotion of recycling champions and work with young residents, including consideration of smiley stickers use on bins
- Consider using large colour wraps on the bin lids to differentiate different recycling bins
- At Bring Bank sites consider using mobile CCTV and where fly tipping can be evidenced follow up with education and civil prosecution
- Regarding any future plans to rationalise the Bring Bank Sites, Members would like to see any plans ahead of any public consultation

Members had interviewed the Cabinet Portfolio with responsibility for Environment, Cllr Rob Broom who responded to a number of areas including:

- the Portfolio Holders' priorities for the future of the service;
- target setting for Stevenage regarding improved recycling and time period;
- barriers to effective recycling;
- measuring success;
- challenges and opportunities to the service through LGR.

Finally, the Committee received some feedback from a Member site visit to the

Cavendish Road recycling depot and from Members who attended with the Stevenage Direct Services refuse and recycling operatives on their collection route. Members were very impressed with the efficiency of the service.

10

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Establishing a Lasting and Sustainable Commitment to Age Friendly Communities and Dementia-Friendly Action in Stevenage

Councillor Myla Arceno moved the following motion:

This Council recognises the rising prevalence of dementia in Stevenage and Hertfordshire, and the profound impact on people, families, and the wider community. We affirm the need for an inclusive borough where people with dementia are understood, respected, and supported to live well. Around 1,100 residents aged 65+ in Stevenage live with dementia—higher than many other Hertfordshire districts*.

Older adults in Stevenage face above-average emergency admissions for falls and frailty, straining health and care services. Women's life expectancy is below the national average, and the gap between the most and least deprived men is 4.8 years. Nearly 40% of older adults with severe frailty, dementia, or end-of-life needs live in the town's most deprived areas, highlighting the link between deprivation and poor health.

Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) is committed to the following services and initiatives:

- **Community Support Service:** For council tenants aged 55+, offering regular contact, emergency help, and support accessing care and social activities. Independent living schemes and "Extra Care" housing provide safe, supported environments.
- **Housing for Older People Strategy (2020–2030):** Joint work with HCC to ensure suitable housing options for ageing residents.
- **Care Connect:** A 24/7 personal alarm and response service run by SBC.
- **Dementia-Friendly Status:** Achieved in 2023, with ongoing review by the Alzheimer's Society and partnership work through Healthy Stevenage and the Dementia Sub-Group. SBC co-produced a booklet of dementia-friendly activities.
- **Age-Friendly Recognition:** Stevenage is nationally recognised as an Age-Friendly Community, with health, leisure, and social opportunities delivered in partnership to reduce isolation and promote active ageing.

Council Resolves:

To build on this foundation and maintain Stevenage's Age-Friendly and Dementia-Friendly status, the Council commits to:

1. **Dementia Training:** dementia awareness training to be added to mandatory training for all SBC staff and elected members to support inclusive service delivery.
2. **Annual Awareness Event:** Host a public Dementia-Friendly Stevenage and International Day for Older People event with partners and carers, aligned with Age-

Friendly work to promote awareness and celebrate progress.

3. Ongoing Accreditation: Work with the Alzheimer's Society and stakeholders to ensure council and partner premises pursue dementia-friendly accreditation.

Maintain registration with the Centre for Better Aging.

4. Inclusive Design: Ensure all council-led developments incorporate dementia- and age-friendly design principles—clear signage, accessible layouts, appropriate lighting, and calm public spaces.

5. Transport and Business Engagement: Require all licensed taxi and private hire drivers to complete dementia awareness training. Encourage local businesses to gain Age and Dementia-Friendly accreditation.

6. Action Plan: Co-produce a Stevenage Age-Friendly and Dementia-Friendly Action Plan with businesses and community stakeholders, setting clear goals and measures of success.

7. Continue Key Services: Maintain the Housing Strategy, Community Support Service, health and wellbeing initiatives, and Care Connect 24/7.

With this motion, the Council reaffirms its commitment to compassion, inclusivity, and foresight—ensuring Stevenage remains a borough where older people and those with dementia are supported, empowered, and welcomed.

* Source: HCC Public Health, 2024

In moving the motion, Councillor Arceno advised it was a lasting and sustainable commitment to age friendly communities and dementia friendly action in Stevenage. She advised that the Council was committed to many services and initiatives such as community support services for Council tenants aged 55 and above. She also advised that in the light of the proposed Local Government Reorganisation, it was essential to have a concrete commitment in Stevenage to older residents in the town, those with dementia and their carers and families. Councillor Arceno reiterated the Council's commitment to continue to support the International Day of Older People and the Dementia Friendly events that were held in support of older residents. She also stressed the importance of awareness raising through training for all including Council staff and elected members.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Sarah Mead advised that the reality of an age friendly community would make a huge difference and acknowledged that a large group of residents were unable to access online services and it was essential that appropriate support was available to them and their carers and families.

Councillor Booth, Leader of the Opposition congratulated Councillor Arceno for bringing the motion to Council's attention. He expressed concern regarding the financial impact on the Council of the Motion and asked if an assessment had been made on the cost of delivering the programme.

Councillor Bibby praised the motion but referred to the ever increasing demand and lack of funding with dementia not being given the highest priority by the Government. He suggested that the Secretary of State for Health be lobbied by the Council for a comprehensive review of the service.

The Leader of the Council advised that the Council would look at the required funding on a scheme by scheme basis and that the Government's Fair Funding

Review should assist the Council in being more flexible in funding these sort of campaigns.

Following further debate, Councillor Arceno, thanked Members for their support on the Motion.

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was carried.

Our national flags – a source of pride and unity in Stevenage

Councillor Andy McGuinness moved the following motion:

This Council believes that the heart of the Town does lie in its people, no matter what their background, and acknowledges and celebrates its founding motto, reflecting a vibrant and diverse community. The Council further believes that our national flags are a source of pride and unity and should not be used to seek to sow disharmony and disunity. Therefore, this Council resolves to:

1. Seek to work collaboratively with the County Council to respectively take down and store all national flags that are being displayed illegally on local authority land or assets.
2. Work with local arts and community organisations to use these flags, where possible, to create artworks, flag displays and murals in appropriate places which celebrate our national flags, the cultural diversity and history of our town, and our long and deep national pride.

In moving the Motion, Councillor McGuinness recognised and appreciated the strong feelings that the issue of the raising of the flags evoked. However he was of the view that the sense of national pride was being manipulated by others for inappropriate ends. He advised that the issue should not be political as the flag belonged to the British people. In his opinion, the flying of the flags had not been done as a sense of pride or community cohesion but borne out of misplaced nationalism and on division not on unity. He was proud of the long history of migration into Britain welcoming those that had been oppressed. He was pleased that the County Council had agreed that they would take down the flags when resources were available and encouraged Stevenage Borough Council to do the same given current concerns voiced by the community.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Stephen Booth expressed concern that the flags should be removed before they caused accidents potentially landing on car windscreens while people were driving. He advised that the flags should be flown as symbols of pride, unity and togetherness and not to intimidate and alarm minorities.

During further debate, the following points were raised:

- Members echoed the sentiment in the first paragraph of the motion that pride was shared in the vibrant and diverse community in the Town;
- The flag represented unity not division and the Council had a clear policy on the display of the national flags which were already flown proudly at civic

buildings safely and appropriately however, flags not seen to be causing any danger to the public would be left;

- In response to a comment made by Councillor Booth regarding a quote by the Prime Minister about colours of faces in Birmingham, it was confirmed by Councillor Booth that this should be attributed to Robert Jenrich MP and not the Prime Minister as originally stated;
- The vast majority of flags were on highways land and property so the motion could be directed to the Liberal Democrat administration at the County Council to address;
- Stevenage Borough Council already worked co-operatively with a number of organisations including the County Council on many issues;
- Caution was required regarding mandating what the creative community in Stevenage should produce in relation to their art installations;
- The flags were being raised by far-right groups to sew division within the community and the motion would allow for a strong message to be sent that the Council would not stand for these campaigns;
- It was disappointing that Members at the meeting appeared uncomfortable with the patriotic display which had been put up proudly by members of the public;
- Currently the flags had different meaning for different people with some feeling uncomfortable and threatened and support should be considered for those affected.

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was lost.

11 **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO CHAIRS/PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

The Council received five questions from Members to Committee Chairs/Portfolio Holders.

The Mayor reminded Members that Standing Orders allowed for one question with a supplementary question only. She advised that she had used her discretion this time to allow for a question with multiple parts but would not allow this at future meetings.

The responses to the five questions had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

(A) Question from Councillor Peter Wilkins re: Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO's)

Supplementary question – Will the Council do all it can to stop the indiscriminate use of HMO's to house asylum seekers when the hotels are closed as this is not an appropriate form of housing in terms of monitoring or support for asylum seekers and would be unpopular with local residents?

The Portfolio Holder advised that the future use of HMO's in Stevenage was currently not known and Councillor Wilkins had been provided with the information relating to the practical planning policies in place to restrict the use

of HMO's in terms of ASB, parking and noise. The Portfolio Holder agreed to provide a more detailed answer outlining the Home Office's policy on rehousing people in an asylum situation into communities when he could.

- (B) Question from Councillor Phil Bibby re: Sports and Leisure Centre
Supplementary question – Is the Portfolio Holder disappointed that the new leisure centre does not accommodate as many sports as the current one does and does not include emerging sports such as pickle ball and padel tennis.

The Portfolio Holder advised that it had been fifty years since the original arts and leisure centre had been built separate from the original swimming pool and a new facility was needed and that this would be a much improved offer for more people in the Town. He would be happy to meet with anyone particularly dissatisfied with the range of activities in the new leisure centre and had already arranged meetings with a number of interested parties.

- (C) Question from Councillor Robin Parker regarding: Garage Forecourt Maintenance.

Supplementary question – can buying a small sweeper be considered to ensure all parts of the garage forecourts could be cleaned.

The Portfolio Holder advised that she would ask officers to look at the possibility and price of the suggestion from Councillor Parker.

- (D) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth regarding: IT

Supplementary question – Could Members be given the opportunity to provide some input into the current software used at the Council

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that the software used was used across the Globe and it appeared that most Members managed to use it with no real issues. Additional training was available if Members felt this was needed.

- (E) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness regarding: the cleaning of shopping areas around the Town

Supplementary question – Could there be some consideration that due care and attention be given to our much loved and much used local shopping centres.

The Portfolio Holder for the Environment advised that the Stevenage Direct Services (SDS) staff did a good job with the resources they had. The issue was allocating resources effectively to try and keep the neighbourhood areas as tidy and presentable as possible. Local residents and local businesses were also key in maintaining and monitoring the areas and must ensure issues were reported to the Council for SDS to respond in a timely fashion.

GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Councillor Richard Henry moved a report in accordance with section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, to approve Councillor Sandra Barr's non-attendance at meetings of the Council for a further period of 6 months until 15 April 2026, on the grounds of ill health.

In seconding the report, Councillor Claire Parris advised that Councillor Barr was an integral part of the Council and her support for the residents of St Nicholas was well documented. She spoke of Cllr Barr's recovery and that her regular meetings with her related to Council and St Nicholas ward business. She also gave reassurances that the St Nicholas Ward and its residents were being fully supported by both Councillor Henry and herself.

Councillors on the whole were supportive of the recommendations but a concern was expressed by a member that although his best wishes for a speedy recovery were sent to Councillor Barr, in his opinion, in the interests of responsibility and representation she should step aside for an alternative representative to be elected.

A number of members spoke in support of the extension to Councillor Barr's non-attendance and referred to her passion and enthusiasm and her contribution to the Council and on behalf of the residents in the Town.

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that, in accordance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972, Councillor Barr's non-attendance at meetings for a further six months, until 15 April 2026 be approved, on the grounds of ill health, and that the Council's best wishes be conveyed to her.

13 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2024/25 AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS

The Council considered a report in respect of the Annual Treasury Management Review 2024/25, including the Prudential Code. It was noted that the report had been endorsed by both the Audit Committee and the Cabinet.

It was moved by Councillor Jeannette Thomas, and seconded by Councillor Carolina Veres, that the Recommendations in the report be approved.

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that the 2024/25 Annual Treasury Management Review be approved.

14 AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 3 September 2025 were received.

15 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.

16 **SPORTS AND LEISURE CENTRE**

The Council considered a Part II report in respect of progress towards delivering the Council's new Stevenage Sports and Leisure Centre

In moving the report, the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure and Wellbeing advised that the new Leisure Centre would be a tremendous asset to the Town and would enable more people to live active healthy lifestyles.

In seconding the report, the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Skills and Transport advised that the development was a significant step forward for the Town and the vast majority of the Town's population.

Following further debate where all Members welcomed the new Leisure Centre, upon being put to the vote it was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the funding to deliver the Sports and Leisure Centre, as set out in the report and included in both the Capital and Treasury Management Strategy be approved.
2. That the funding be included in the Capital Strategy to fund the Sports and Leisure Centre

CHAIR

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Monday, 17 November 2025

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Nazmin Chowdhury, (Mayor), Lloyd Briscoe (Deputy Mayor), Myla Arceno, Julie Ashley-Wren, Philip Bibby, Stephen Booth, , Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Kamal Choudhury, Forhad Chowdhury, Peter Clark, Coleen De Freitas, Alistair Gordon, Lynda Guy, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Dermot Kehoe, Andy McGuinness, Claire Parris, Tom Plater, Loraine Rossati, Simon Speller, Jeannette Thomas, Carolina Veres, Peter Wilkins and Nigel Williams

Start / End Start Time: 2.00pm
Time: End Time: 3.10pm

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

Apologies were received from Councillors Sandra Barr, Robert Boyle, Leanne Brady, Akin Elekolusi, Rob Henry, Mason Humberstone, Lin Martin-Haugh, Sarah Mead, Robin Parker, Ellie Plater, Ceara Roopchand, Jade Woods and Tom Wren.

The Mayor advised that many of the Members who had given apologies had contributed to committee discussions, briefings and community meetings on Local Government Reorganisation and she thanked them for their contributions so far, and noted the exceptional circumstances of this meeting.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN HERTFORDSHIRE - SUBMISSION OF FINAL PROPOSAL**

The Council considered a report in respect of Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire – Submission of Final Proposal.

The Chief Executive gave a presentation on the item which included:

- Reminder of the Government's Criteria;
- The vision for Hertfordshire;
- How all Authorities had worked together in Hertfordshire;
- The Unitary model options being considered and how those options had been identified;
- Hertfordshire's devolution ambitions; and
- The Government's timeline and decision making process.

Councillor Richard Henry, Leader of the Council moved the report and outlined his support for the 4 Unitary Model. He thanked Members and Officers for their support and spoke of the enormous amount of work that had been undertaken on this issue both cross boundary and cross political parties for the benefit of communities across Hertfordshire.

The Leader spoke of his commitment to investing in councils that were rooted in communities and with the ability to adapt to local needs and also to ensure the continuation of the Council's ambitious plans being at the forefront now and in the future. Councillor Henry advised that he had met with local partners, businesses and communities to hear their views during a number of different local engagement events across Hertfordshire.

In relation to devolution, the Leader expressed his support for powers moving from Westminster to local areas with a Strategic Mayor for Hertfordshire who could help to secure funding to continue regeneration plans, the creation of jobs for local people and improvements to the local area.

In seconding the report, Councillor Jeannette Thomas, Deputy Leader of the Council stated her support for the 4 unitary model as she believed that it was the closest way of working with the local community.

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Stephen Booth, advised that the options did not take into account the geography of the areas and would not enhance local accountability.

A number of Councillors spoke of their support for the 4 unitary model and raised the following points:

- The 4 unitary model was closest to communities with the smallest number in terms of population sizes of the new authorities;
- Smaller distances provided efficiencies, better connection and service delivery options in the future;
- The 4 unitary model was closer to neighbourhoods and the ability to manage services at the local level;
- Residents had made it clear that they wanted Councils to be close and not remote;
- In the Central Authority within the 4 unitary model, Stevenage would sit at the heart of a corridor of towns that shared daily connections for work, study and services.
- Regeneration and economic growth could continue but still be rooted in local knowledge;
- Smaller locally focussed councils would be able to join up services which mattered most to families;
- Unitary Councils would stop the confusion for residents in relation to which Councils were responsible for particular services;
- The 4 unitary model had been supported in indicative meetings of councils across Hertfordshire.

Opposition Members advised that they would be voting to abstain and referenced

the following points:

- The options did not take into account the geography of the areas;
- No options would enhance local accountability in the way that the current model did;
- the 4 unitary model had political footprints linked with it and the option least economically viable;
- Local Government Reorganisation would not deliver better outcomes for residents.
- The work of the Leader and other Members as well as officers in working through what had been a difficult process was acknowledged.

Councillor Bibby advised that he would be supporting the 2 unitary model as he believed that residents were not concerned with who delivered their services and that this model was the most advantageous economically.

At the end of the debate, in accordance with the Constitution, 10 Members indicated their support for a recorded vote* to be taken on the item and it was **RESOLVED** that the proposal be submitted and that the modified four unitary option (4UA modified) be indicated as preferred and that the Secretary of State be formally requested to modify the proposal by boundary changes as set out in the proposal.

*Recorded Vote

2 Unitary Model – Councillor Phil Bibby – 1

3 Unitary Model – 0 votes

4 Unitary Model – Councillors Myla Arceno, Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Kamal Choudhury, Forhad Chowdhury, Nazmin Chowdhury, Peter Clark, Coleen De Freitas, Alistair Gorden, Lynda Guy, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Dermot Kehoe, Claire Parris, Tom Plater, Loraine Rossati, Simon Speller, Jeannette Thomas, Carolina Veres and Nigel Williams – 21

Abstain – Councillors Julie Ashley-Wren, Stephen Booth, Andy McGuinness and Peter Wilkins – 4

Absent – Councillors Sandra Barr, Robert Boyle, Leanne Brady, Akin Elekolusi, Rob Henry, Mason Humberstone, Lin Martin- Haugh, Sarah Mead, Robin Parker CC, Ellie Plater, Ceara Roopchand, Jade Woods and Tom Wren – 13

CHAIR

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AUDIT COMMITTEE/ CABINET / COUNCIL

Portfolio Area: Resources and Performance

Date: 4 November 2025 /
12 November 2025 /
17 December 2025



MID YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2025/26 AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS

NON-KEY DECISION

Author – Rhona Bellis
Lead Officer – Atif Iqbal
Contact Officer – Atif Iqbal

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To update Members on the Treasury Management activities in 2025/26 and review effectiveness of the 2025/26 Treasury Management and Investment Strategy including the 2025/26 prudential and treasury indicators.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Audit Committee

That subject to any comments by the Audit Committee to the Cabinet, the 2025/26 Mid-Year Treasury Management Review, revised Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and Prudential indicators reports is recommended to Council for approval.

2.2 Cabinet

That subject to any comments made by the Cabinet, in addition to those made by the Audit Committee, the 2025/26 Mid-Year Treasury Management Review, revised Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and Prudential indicators report is recommended to Council for approval.

2.3 Council

That subject to any comments from the Audit Committee and the Cabinet, 2025/26 Mid-Year Treasury Management Review, revised Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and Prudential indicators report be approved by Council.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 The Council operates a balanced budget, which broadly means cash raised during the year will meet its cash expenditure. Part of the treasury management operations ensure this cash flow is adequately planned, with surplus monies being invested in low-risk counterparties, providing adequate liquidity initially before considering optimising investment return.
- 3.1.2 The second main function of the treasury management service is the funding of the Council's capital plans, (subject to affordability). These capital plans provide a guide to the borrowing need of the Council, essentially the longer-term cash flow planning to ensure the Council can meet its capital spending operations. This management of longer-term cash may involve arranging long or short-term loans, or using longer term cash flow surpluses, and on occasion any debt previously drawn may be restructured to meet Council risk or cost objectives.

Accordingly, treasury management is defined 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."

- 3.1.3 This report has been written in accordance with the requirements of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management (revised 2021). The primary requirements of the Code are as follows:
- Creation and maintenance of a Treasury Management Policy Statement which sets out the policies and objectives of the Council's treasury management activities.
 - Creation and maintenance of Treasury Management Practices which set out the manner in which the Council will seek to achieve those policies and objectives.
 - Receipt by the full Council of an annual Treasury Management Strategy Statement - including the Annual Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy - for the year ahead, a Mid-year Review Report and an Annual Report, (stewardship report), covering activities during the previous year.

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- Delegation by the Council of responsibilities for implementing and monitoring treasury management policies and practices and for the execution and administration of treasury management decisions.
- Delegation by the Council of the role of scrutiny of treasury management strategy and policies to a specific named body. For this Council, the delegated body is Audit committee.

3.1.4 In December 2021, CIPFA revised the Code to require, all local authorities to report on:

- a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services.
- an overview of how the associated risk is managed.
- the implications for future financial sustainability.

These elements are covered in the annual Capital Strategy reported to Council in February each year.

3.1.5 CIPFA is currently consulting local authorities in respect of potential changes to the Codes. At this stage, the focus seems to be primarily on the non-treasury investment aspects of local authority activity. Officers will provide an update on any material developments/changes in due course.

3.1.6 This mid-year report has been prepared in compliance with CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management, and covers the following:

- An economic update for the first half of the 2025/26 financial year.
- A review of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy.
- The Council's capital expenditure, as set out in the Capital Strategy, and prudential indicators.
- A review of the Council's investment portfolio for 2025/26.
- A review of the Council's borrowing strategy for 2025/26.
- A review of compliance with Treasury and Prudential Limits for 2025/26.

3.2 Economics and interest rates

3.2.1 Economics update.

3.2.2 The first half of 2025/26 saw:

- A 0.3% pick up in GDP for the period April to June 2025. More recently, the economy flatlined in July.
- CPI inflation has ebbed and flowed but finished September at 3.8%, whilst core inflation eased to 3.6%.
- The Bank of England cut interest rates from 4.50% to 4.25% in May, and then to 4% in August.
- The 10-year gilt yield fluctuated between 4.4% and 4.8%, ending the half year at 4.70%.

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3.2.3 Looking ahead on the economy, ongoing speculation about further tax rises in the Autumn Budget on 26 November will remain a drag on GDP growth for a while yet. GDP growth for 2025 is forecast by Capital Economics to be 1.3%.

3.2.4 Yields on Gilts directly impact the councils cost to borrow from PWLB.

- The yield on the 10-year gilt rose from 4.46% to 4.60% in early July. In an era of high debt, high interest rates and low GDP growth, the markets are now more sensitive to fiscal risks than before the pandemic. During August, long-dated gilts underwent a particularly pronounced sell-off, climbing 22 basis points and reaching a 27-year high of 5.6% by the end of the month. While yields have since eased back, the market sell-off was driven by investor concerns over growing supply-demand imbalances, stemming from unease over the lack of fiscal consolidation and reduced demand from traditional long-dated bond purchasers like pension funds. For 10-year gilts, by late September, sticky inflation, resilient activity data and a hawkish Bank of England have kept yields elevated over 4.70%.

3.2.5 As the council invests excess cash mainly with banks, the impact of changes in the BOE base rate directly impacts the interest earned on those investments over time.

- In August, a further rate cut was implemented by the BOE. However, a 5-4 split vote for a rate cut to 4% laid bare the different views within the Monetary Policy Committee, with the accompanying commentary noting the decision was “finely balanced” and reiterating that future rate cuts would be undertaken “gradually and carefully”. Ultimately, Governor Bailey was the casting vote for a rate cut but with the CPI measure of inflation expected to reach at least 4% later this year, the MPC will be wary of making any further rate cuts until inflation begins its slow downwards trajectory back towards 2%. The Bank of England does not anticipate CPI getting to 2% until early 2027.

3.2.6 Interest Rate Forecasts

3.2.7 The Council has appointed MUFG Corporate Markets as its treasury advisors and part of their service is to assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates. The PWLB rate forecasts below are based on the Certainty Rate* (the standard rate minus 20 bps, calculated as gilts plus 80bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1st November 2012.

3.2.8 The latest forecast (MUFG 10 October) sets out a view that short, medium, and long-dated interest rates will reduce gradually over the next year or two, as the Bank of England continues to prioritise controlling inflation.

Chart 1

| Interest Rate Forecasts | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Bank Rate | Dec-25 | Mar-26 | Jun-26 | Sep-26 | Dec-26 | Mar-27 | Jun-27 | Sep-27 |
| MUFG CM | 4.00% | 3.75% | 3.75% | 3.50% | 3.50% | 3.50% | 3.50% | 3.25% |
| Cap Econ | 4.00% | 3.75% | 3.50% | 3.25% | 3.00% | 3.00% | 3.00% | 3.00% |
| 5Y PWLB RATE | | | | | | | | |
| MUFG CM | 4.70% | 4.50% | 4.40% | 4.30% | 4.30% | 4.30% | 4.20% | 4.20% |
| Cap Econ | 5.00% | 4.80% | 4.70% | 4.60% | 4.50% | 4.50% | 4.50% | 4.60% |
| 10Y PWLB RATE | | | | | | | | |
| MUFG CM | 5.20% | 5.00% | 4.90% | 4.80% | 4.80% | 4.80% | 4.70% | 4.70% |
| Cap Econ | 5.60% | 5.40% | 5.30% | 5.20% | 5.10% | 5.10% | 5.20% | 5.30% |
| 25Y PWLB RATE | | | | | | | | |
| MUFG CM | 5.90% | 5.70% | 5.70% | 5.50% | 5.50% | 5.50% | 5.40% | 5.40% |
| Cap Econ | 6.20% | 6.00% | 5.90% | 5.70% | 5.50% | 5.60% | 5.60% | 5.70% |
| 50Y PWLB RATE | | | | | | | | |
| MUFG CM | 5.60% | 5.40% | 5.40% | 5.30% | 5.30% | 5.30% | 5.20% | 5.20% |
| Cap Econ | 5.80% | 5.60% | 5.50% | 5.30% | 5.20% | 5.20% | 5.30% | 5.40% |

* Certainty Rate reduction HRA – 0.6% is not included above

4 Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy Update

4.1.1 The Treasury Management Strategy was approved by Council on 26 February 2025.

4.1.2 In line with the changes to the MRP regulations and Guidance, Members are asked to authorise the revision to the Council's MRP policy for 2025/26 as it relates to capital loans, as follows -

Capital Loans

Where the Council has issued capital loans that are categorised as **non-commercial**, and have not been subject to a recognised credit loss in the current or any previous financial year, 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.

For capital loans which are classed as **commercial** then the Authority will provide MRP over a maximum of the useful life of the assets purchased by the third party.

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.

Capital receipts received from the non-commercial and commercial loan repayments in the financial year will be used to reduce the debt liability i.e. the capital receipts will be used in lieu of MRP to reduce the CFR.

For capital loans to third parties granted before 7 May 2024 - Where those loans have been subject to an actual or expected credit loss in the current or any previous financial year then MRP will be provided over the useful life of the assets purchased by the third party.

For capital loans to third parties granted on or after 7 May 2024 - Where those loans are subject to an expected or actual credit loss, then the MRP charge will be at least

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the amount of the recognised credit loss for the financial year, after adjusting for any previous MRP or capital receipts applied to the loan”.

4.1.3 There are no other policy changes to the TMSS; the remaining details in this report update the position in the light of the updated economic position and budgetary changes already approved.

4.2 The Council's Capital Position (Prudential Indicators).

4.2.1 This part of the report is structured to update:

- The Council's capital expenditure plans and how these plans are being financed.
- The impact of the changes in the capital expenditure plans on the prudential indicators and the underlying need to borrow; and
- Compliance with the limits in place for borrowing activity.

4.2.2 Prudential Indicator for Capital Expenditure and changes to Financing of the Capital Programme.

4.2.3 The table below shows the revised estimates for capital expenditure and financing and the changes since the capital programme was agreed at the Budget. The borrowing element of the table increases the underlying indebtedness of the Council by way of the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR), although this will be reduced in part by revenue charges for the repayment of debt (the Minimum Revenue Provision). This direct borrowing need may also be supplemented by maturing debt and other treasury requirements.

| Table 1 Capital Expenditure and Financing | | | |
|--|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Original Capital Strategy (Council February 2025) | Revised Capital Strategy Q2 | <i>Movement¹</i> |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| Capital Expenditure: | | | |
| General Fund Capital Expenditure | 51,821 | 41,433 | (10,388) |
| HRA Capital Expenditure | 51,399 | 39,387 | (12,012) |
| Total Capital Expenditure | 103,220 | 80,820 | (22,400) |
| Financed by: | | | |
| Capital Receipts | (16,648) | (13,042) | 3,607 |
| Capital Grants /Contributions | (39,464) | (32,022) | 7,442 |
| Capital Reserves | (569) | (454) | 115 |
| Revenue contributions & Reserves | (617) | (1,011) | (394) |

¹ This movement differs from that reported in the quarterly Capital Monitoring reports as that report uses the latest budget rather than the original as a comparator.

| Table 1 Capital Expenditure and Financing | | | |
|--|--|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Original Capital Strategy (Council February 2025) | Revised Capital Strategy Q2 | <i>Movement¹</i> |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| Major Repairs Reserve | (13,138) | (13,138) | 0 |
| Total Financing | (70,436) | (59,666) | 10,770 |
| Borrowing requirement | 32,784 | 21,154 | 11,630 |

4.2.4 The General Fund net reduction of £10.3Million includes:

- Re-phasing of £8.8Million of 2024/25 budgets into 2025/26 across all services.
- Re-phasing of £ (17.5) Million capital budgets in from 2025/26 into future years.
- Removal of budgets no longer required and addition of fully grant funded schemes – £ (1.6) Million (net).

Details are included in the quarterly monitoring reports referred to below.

4.2.5 The HRA net reduction of £12Million is due to re-phasing of the Housing Development and investment budgets.

4.3 Changes to the Prudential Indicators for the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR), External Debt and the Operational

4.3.1 The table below shows the CFR, which is the underlying external need to incur borrowing for a capital purpose. It also shows the expected debt position over the period, which is termed the Operational Boundary.

Prudential Indicator – Capital Financing Requirement

We are on target to be within 3.4% of the original forecast CFR.

Prudential Indicator - the Operational Boundary for external debt.

We are on target to be within the original limit for external borrowing.

| Table 2 £000 | 2025/26 Original Estimate Council February 2025 | 2025/26 Revised Estimate Mid-Year |
|--|--|--|
| Prudential Indicator – Capital Financing Requirement | | |
| CFR – non housing | 70,561 | 61,750 |
| CFR – housing | 286,179 | 283,039 |
| Total CFR | 356,740 | 344,789 |
| Net movement in CFR | | (11,951) |
| Prudential Indicator – the Operational Boundary for external debt | | |
| Borrowing | 340,805 | 335,855 |
| Other long-term liabilities | 15,935 | 15,935 |
| Total debt (year-end position) | 356,740 | 351,790 |
| Net movement in OB | | (4,950) |

4.4 Limits to Borrowing Activity

- 4.4.1 The first key control over the treasury activity is a prudential indicator to ensure that over the medium term, net borrowing (borrowings less investments) will only be for a capital purpose. **Gross external borrowing** should not, except in the short term, exceed the total of CFR in the preceding year plus the estimates of any additional CFR for 2025/26 and next two financial years.
- 4.4.2 A further prudential indicator controls the overall level of borrowing. This is the Authorised Limit which represents the limit beyond which borrowing is prohibited and needs to be set and revised by Members. It reflects the level of borrowing which, while not desired, could be afforded in the short term, but is not sustainable in the longer term. It is the expected maximum borrowing need with some headroom for unexpected movements. This is the statutory limit determined under section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003.

| Table 3 Authorised limits | Operational Boundary £'000 | Authorised Limit £'000 | Actual External Debt 30/09/2025 £'000 |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| General Fund | 66,751 | 68,750 | 24,842 |
| HRA | 285,039 | 294,039 | 275,250 |
| Total Debt | 351,790 | 362,789 | 300,092 |
| CFR (projected year-end position) | | | 344,789 |
| Gross debt less than CFR | | | Yes |

- 4.4.3 A temporary breach of the operational boundary is permissible for short term cash flow purposes however a breach of the authorised limit would require a report to Council. There have been no breaches of either limit in the period for 2025/26.

4.5 Borrowing

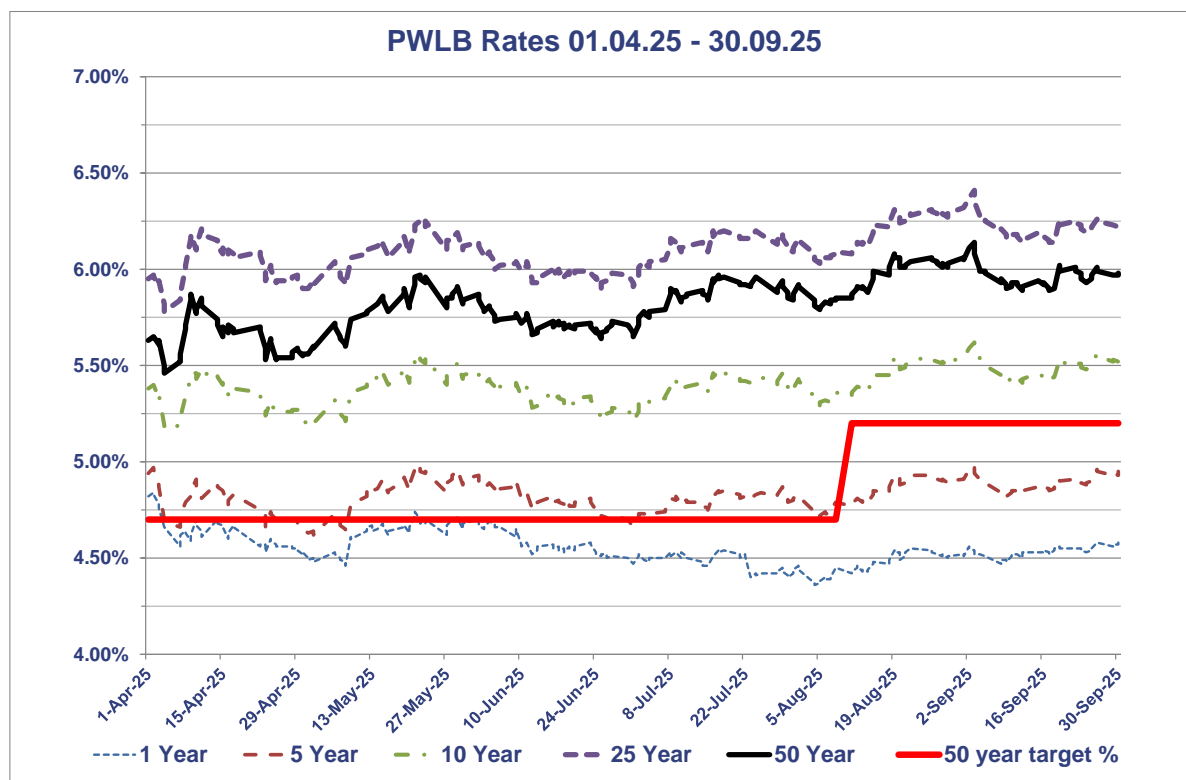
- 4.5.1 The Council's capital financing requirement (CFR) for 2025/26 is £345Million. The CFR denotes the Council's underlying need to borrow for capital

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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. Table 3 shows the Council has borrowings of £300Million and is forecast to utilise £45Million of cash flow funds in lieu of borrowing (Forecast CFR less total forecast debt). This is a prudent and cost-effective approach in the current economic climate but will require ongoing monitoring in the event that any upside risk to gilt yields prevails.

- 4.5.2 Capital programme is being kept under regular review due to the effects of inflationary pressures, shortages of materials and labour. The Council borrowing strategy will, therefore, also be regularly reviewed and then revised, if necessary, in order to achieve optimum value and risk exposure in the long-term.
- 4.5.3 No additional external borrowing has been taken out as at 30 September 2025.
- 4.5.4 It is anticipated that borrowing will be undertaken during the financial year in line with financing in table 1 above.
- 4.5.5 Borrowing rates from PWLB are based on Gilt yields through HM Treasury determining a specified margin to add to gilt yields. The main influences on gilt yields and Bank Rate, inflation expectations and movements in US treasury yields.
- 4.5.6 Gilt yields and PWLB certainty rates have remained relatively volatile throughout the six months under review, but the general trend has been for medium and longer dated parts of the curve to shift higher whilst the 5-year part of the curve finished September close to where it began in April.
- 4.5.7 At this juncture, MUFG Corporate Markets (Council's Treasury Advisors) still forecasts rates to fall back over the next two to three years as inflation dampens, although there is upside risk to all forecasts at present. The CPI measure of inflation is expected to fall below 2% in early 2027 but hit a peak of 4% or higher later in 2025.
- 4.5.8 The Bank of England announced in September that it would be favouring the short and medium part of the curve for the foreseeable future when issuing gilts. Market reaction to national and international events is likely to be the decisive factor in future gilt market attractiveness to investors and their willingness to buy UK sovereign debt.
- 4.5.9 The Chart below shows the volatility of the PWLB borrowing rates from 2 April 2025 to 30 September 2025.

Chart 2



4.6 Compliance with Treasury and Prudential Limits

- 4.6.1 It is a statutory duty for the Council to determine and keep under review the affordable borrowing limits. During the half year ended 30 September 2025 the Council has operated within the treasury and prudential indicators set out in the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2025/26. The Chief Finance Officer reports that no difficulties are envisaged for the current or future years in complying with these indicators.
- 4.6.2 All treasury management operations have also been conducted in full compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Practices.

4.7 Annual Investment Strategy

- 4.7.1 The Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) for 2025/26, which includes the Annual Investment Strategy, was approved by the Council on 26 February 2025. In accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice, it sets out the Council's investment priorities as being:
- Security of capital
 - Liquidity
 - Yield
- 4.7.2 The Council will aim to achieve the optimum return (yield) on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity and with the Council's risk appetite. In the current economic climate, it is considered appropriate to keep investments short term to cover cash flow needs, but also

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to seek out value available in periods up to 12 months with high credit quality financial institutions, using the MUFG Corporate Markets suggested creditworthiness approach, including a minimum sovereign credit rating and Credit Default Swap (CDS) overlay information.

- 4.7.3 There were no breaches to this policy in the year to 30 September 2025 with the investment activity conforming to the approved strategy. The Council had no liquidity difficulties, and no funds have been placed with the Debt Management Office (DMO), demonstrating that counterparty limits and availability for placing funds approved in the TM Strategy were working effectively. It is possible that surplus funds that may be borrowed during 2025/26 will be placed in the DMO temporarily, if PWLB borrowing rates are advantageous and cash balances due to timing of taking out new loans would breach other counterparty limits.

Creditworthiness

- 4.7.4 The UK's sovereign rating has proven robust through the first half of 2024/25. The Government is expected to outline in detail its fiscal proposals in the Budget scheduled for 26 November 2025.

Investment Counterparty criteria

- 4.7.5 The current investment counterparty criteria selection approved in the TMSS is meeting the requirement of the treasury management function. It is noted that sentiment in the current economic climate can easily shift, so it remains important to undertake continual monitoring of all aspects of risk and return in the current circumstances.
- 4.7.6 Countries included are those where relevant banks are active in Sterling markets.
- 4.7.7 The Specified and Non-Specified Investment Criteria have been reviewed and updated in the Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26 which was agreed at Full Council in February 2025, and no further amendments are proposed at this stage.

4.8 Investment performance year to date as of 30 September 2025

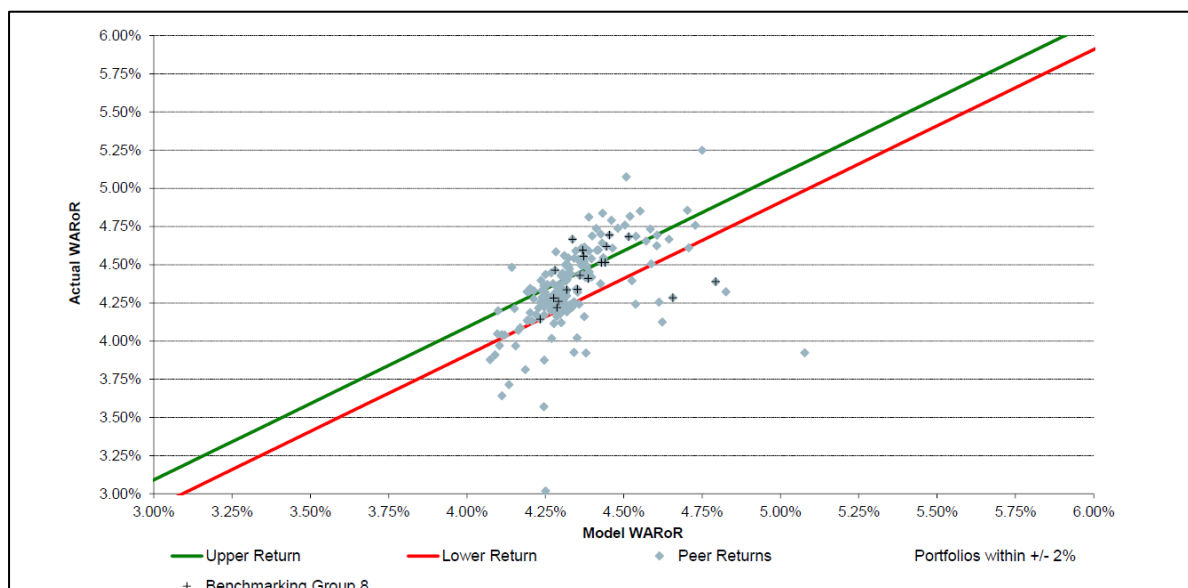
- 4.8.1 The Council's current investment portfolio consists of "conventional" cash investments: deposits with banks and building societies, Money Market Funds, and loans to other Local Authorities.
- 4.8.2 The average level of funds available for investment purposes during the first half of the financial year was £55Million, earning an average interest rate of 4.59%. Interest earned to 30 September 2025 was £1.265Million. Projected investment balances at 31 March 2026 are currently £35Million and forecast external interest receivable from investments is currently £2.2Million against a working budget of £2Million.
- 4.8.3 The council's treasury advisors (MUFG), provide regular benchmarking analysis of the performance of the council's investments against a group of 20 other local authorities. The September 2025 report shows performance of the

Part I

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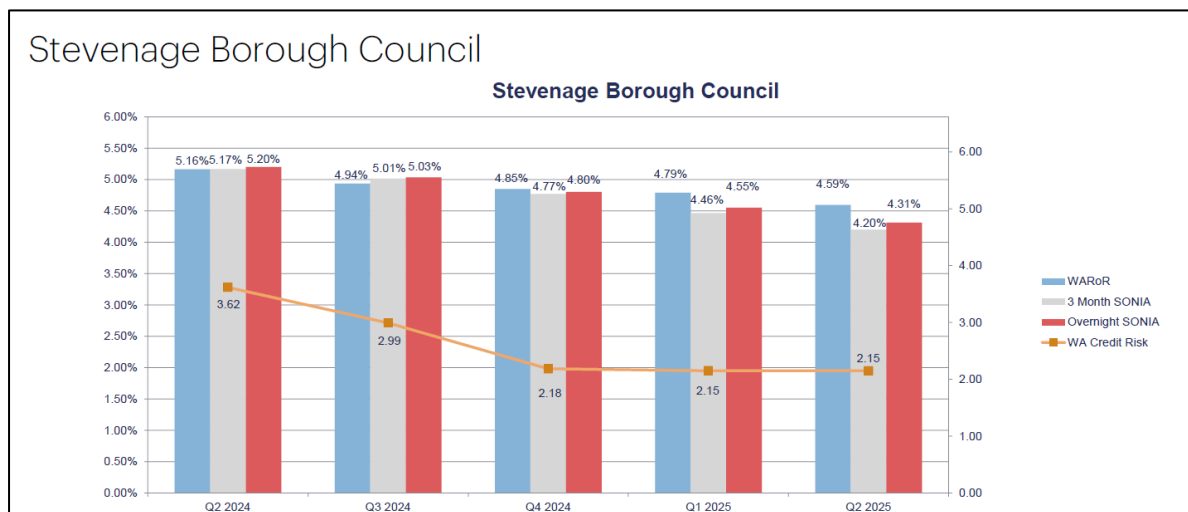
portfolio held at 30 September 2025 being in the upper return range against model returns (4.59% return against a target of 4.28%-4.46%)².

Chart 3 Benchmarking Group 8 September 2025



4.8.4 Performance against Sonia³, shows an improvement over the period from Q2 2024 partly as a result of an old poorly performing investment maturing and being reinvested at higher interest rates.

Chart 4 Performance against Sonia



4.8.5 The Council's balances are made up of cash reserves e.g. HRA and General Fund balances, restricted use receipts e.g. right to buy one for one receipts and balances held for provisions such as business rate appeals and debt repayment.

² WARoR = Weighted average rate of return on investments

³ Sonia is a benchmarking index administered by the BOE

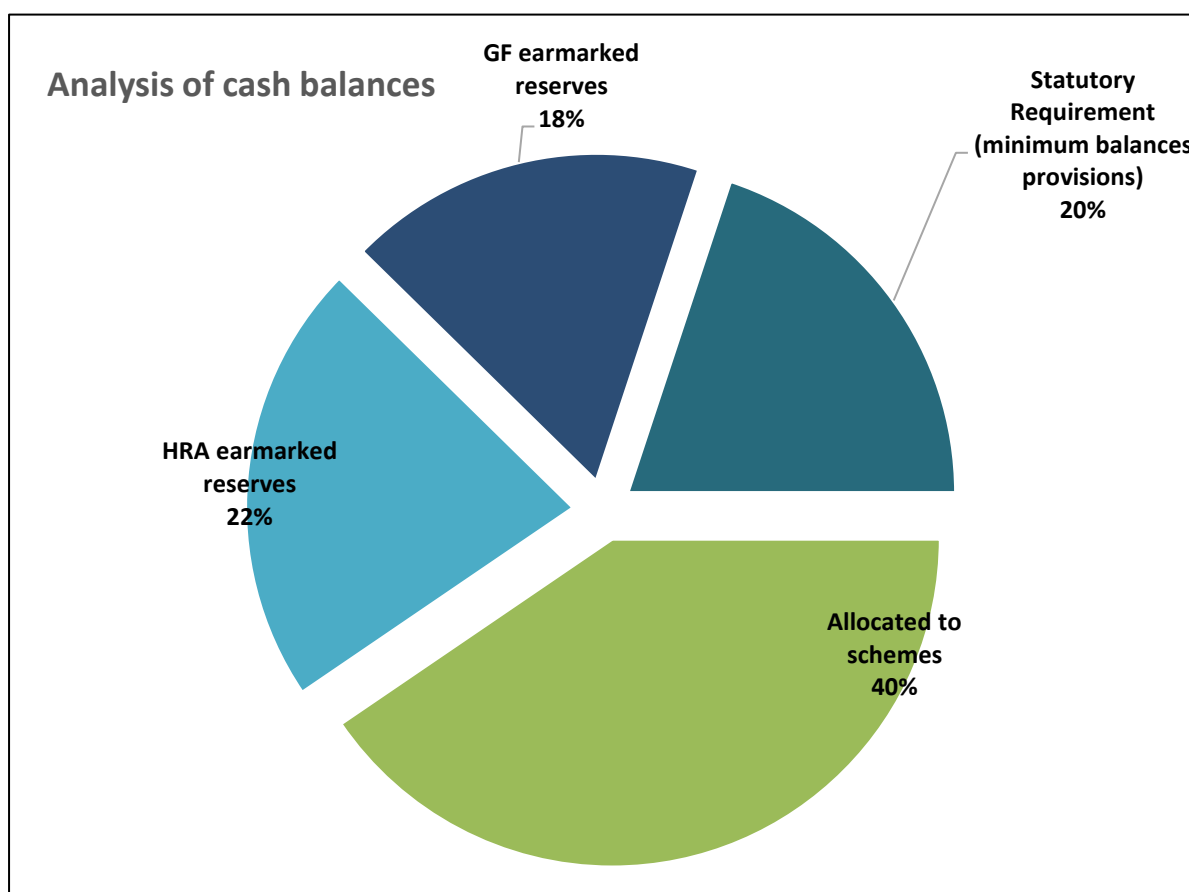
Part I

Release to Press

4.8.6 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 thirty year period, which means, while not committed in the current year; they are required in future years.

4.8.7 The following chart shows the planned use of cash balances held as at 30 September 2025.

Chart 5



4.8.8 The restrictive use of a proportion of the cash balances set out above, plus the planned use of resources in line with the Council's capital and revenue strategies mean that the investment balance of £57Million as at 30 September 2025 is not available for new expenditure.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

5.1.1 This report is of a financial nature and reviews the treasury management function for 2025/26 to date. Any consequential financial impacts identified in the Capital strategy and Revenue budget monitoring reports have been incorporated into this report.

Part I
Release to Press

- 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.

5.3 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.
- 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 take into account the relative risk of investments and also 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 thirty-year spending plans if interest rates rise above budgeted rates. Mitigation is included in the revision to the BP since 2023 (2025 revision now underway), including requiring higher levels of reserves to be maintained in the medium term to cover interest rate risks.

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.

Part I
Release to Press

5.5 Climate Change Implications

- 5.5.1 The council's investment portfolio is made up of short to medium term investments held to fund the council's activities. Ensuring these are secure, appropriately liquid and provide a return, aligns with the Council's ambition to attempt to be carbon neutral by 2030.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- BD1 Annual Treasury Management Strategy including Prudential Code Indicators 2025/26 (Council 26 February 2025)
- BD2 Quarter 1 Revenue and Capital Monitoring Report 2025/26 – General Fund and HRA (Cabinet 17 September 2025)
- BD3 Quarter 2 Revenue and Capital Monitoring Report 2025/26 – General Fund and HRA (Cabinet 12 November 2025)

APPENDICES

- Appendix A Investment Portfolio
- Appendix B Approved Countries for Investments as of 30 September 2025
- Appendix C Minimum Revenue Provision Policy

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| Institution | Instrument Type | Start | Maturity | Yield | Principal |
|--|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-------|-------------------|
| Basildon Borough council | Fixed Term Deposit | 06-Jan-25 | 05-Jan-26 | 5.50% | 5,000,000 |
| Lloyds Bank | Fixed Term Deposit | 25-Mar-25 | 23-Dec-25 | 4.51% | 2,000,000 |
| Landesbank | Fixed Term Deposit | 07-Apr-25 | 27-Mar-26 | 4.25% | 3,000,000 |
| Landesbank (Helaba) | Fixed Term Deposit | 28-Apr-25 | 28-Oct-25 | 4.25% | 3,000,000 |
| National Bank of Canada | Fixed Term Deposit | 14-Jul-25 | 14-Oct-25 | 4.15% | 5,000,000 |
| ANZ Bank | Fixed Term Deposit | 21-Jul-25 | 21-Jan-26 | 4.30% | 3,000,000 |
| ANZ Bank (Australia and New Zeland Bank) | Fixed Term Deposit | 06-Aug-25 | 06-Feb-26 | 4.23% | 3,000,000 |
| ANZ Bank | Fixed Term Deposit | 13-Aug-25 | 13-Nov-25 | 4.20% | 1,000,000 |
| Landesbank Hessen Thuringen Girozentrale-Frankfurt | Fixed Term Deposit | 14-Aug-25 | 13-Aug-26 | 4.12% | 2,000,000 |
| Surrey County Council | Fixed Term Deposit | 15-Sep-25 | 05-Jan-26 | 4.10% | 5,000,000 |
| Lancashire County Council | Fixed Term Deposit | 24-Sep-25 | 24-Mar-26 | 4.50% | 5,000,000 |
| | | | | | 37,000,000 |
| MMF Aberdeen | Money Market Fund | | | | 10,000,000 |
| MMF CCLA | Money Market Fund | | | | 8,300,000 |
| MMF Morgan Stanley | Money Market Fund | | | | 500,000 |
| MMF HSBC | Money Market Fund | | | | 1,032,000 |
| | | | | | 19,832,000 |
| Total | | | | | 56,832,000 |

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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 21.10.25)

AAA

- Australia
- Denmark
- Germany
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Singapore
- Sweden
- Switzerland

AA+

- Canada
- Finland
- U.S.A.

AA

- Abu Dhabi (UAE)
- Finland

AA-

- France
- **U.K.**

A+

- Belgium

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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Meeting: COUNCIL
Date: 17 DECEMBER 2025



COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS – UPDATE REPORT

Author – Luke Fattorusso Ext No.2174
Lead Officers – Tom Pike / Victoria Wilders Ext No.2288
Contact Officers – Luke Fattorusso / Lisa Jerome Ext Nos.2174 / 2203

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 Following the constitution of a new political group on the Council and in accordance with Regulation 17 of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990, the Council is required to review the Committee Memberships on the Council.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Council review the current Committee Memberships following the constitution of a new political group on the Council.
- 2.2 That 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* – 14 Members (11 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Member, 1 Conservative Member)
 - Community Select Committee* – 10 Members (7 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members, 1 Reform UK Member)
 - Environment and Economy Select Committee* – 11 Members (8 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members, 1 Reform UK Member)
 - Planning & Development Committee* – 14 Members (11 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members, 1 Reform UK Member)
 - Licensing Committee – 14 Members (12 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members)

- General Purposes Committee* – 14 Members (12 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members)
- Appointments Committee* – 8 Members (7 Labour Members, 1 Liberal Democrat Member)
- Standards Committee* – 8 Members (6 Labour Members, 1 Liberal Democrat Member, 1 Conservative Member)
- Audit Committee* – 10 Members (7 Labour Members, 1 Liberal Democrat Member, 1 Reform UK Member, 1 Conservative Member) + 1 Co-opted non-elected member
- Statement of Accounts Committee* – 8 Members (6 Labour Members, 1 Liberal Democrat Member, 1 Reform UK Member)
- Joint Consultative Committee* – 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

2.3 That the Memberships of the various Committees, as set out in Appendix A, be approved.

2.3 That Council note that the Leader of the Reform UK Group is Cllr Mason Humberstone and that the Deputy Leader of the Group is Cllr Rob Henry.

2.4 That Council note that the Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group will be Cllr Andy McGuinness with effect from 1 January 2026, and the Deputy Leader of the Group will be Cllr Stephen Booth.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (Section 15) requires Committees of the Council to reflect the political balance of the Council.

3.2 Following the constitution of a new political group on the Council and change in political balance, the Council is required to review the Committee Memberships on the Council.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTIONS AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 At the Annual Council meeting in May, 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.

- 4.2 Following the constitution of a new political group on the Council and change in political balance, the Council is required to review the Committee Memberships on the Council and, accordingly, update the Memberships of those Committees. This report provides the details of the proposed political composition and Memberships of the respective Committees.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (LGHA) introduced a requirement that appointments to committees, sub-committees and other bodies achieve a political balance. The authority must conduct that review at or as soon as practicable after the annual meeting and at such times as may be prescribed by regulations.
- 5.2 The LGHA achieves this through the operation of s.15 in relation to the review, s.16 in respect of the effect of that review, s.17 in respect of exceptions and, as made under paragraph 3 of Schedule 1, the application of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990 (as amended).

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Council's Constitution.

APPENDICES

Appendix A - Appointment of Committees/Panels of the Council

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APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES/PANELS OF THE COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

14 Members (11-2-0-1)

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
E Plater
C Roopchand

Community Select Committee

10 Members (7-2-1-0)

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

Environment & Economy Select Committee

11 Members (8-2-1-0)

Councillors - L Brady (Chair)
A McGuinness (Vice-Chair)
R Boyle
J Brown
F Chowdhury
A Gordon
Rob Henry
C Parris
C Roopchand
P Wilkins
J Woods

Planning & Development Committee

14 Members (11-2-1-0)

- 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
Rob Henry
E Plater
N Williams
- Substitutes - T Wren
+ 6 Labour substitutes (tba)

Licensing Committee

14 Members (12-2-0-0)

- 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
L Rossati
C Veres
T Wren

General Purposes Committee

14 Members (12-2-0-0)

- 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
L Rossati
C Veres
T Wren

Appointments Committee

8 Members (7-1-0-0)

Councillors - Richard Henry (Chair)
S Booth
L Briscoe
L Martin-Haugh
L Rossati
S Speller
J Thomas
N Williams

Standards Committee

8 Members (6-1-0-1)

Councillors - J Hollywell (Chair)
M Arceno
P Bibby
R Broom
D Kehoe
L Rossati
J Woods
T Wren

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

Audit Committee

10 Elected Members (7-1-1-1) + 1 Independent Co-opted Member (S Uddin)

Councillors – C Veres (Chair)
L Briscoe (Vice-Chair)
P Bibby
R Boyle
L Brady
M Humberstone
D Kehoe
T Plater
C Roopchand
T Wren

Statement of Accounts Committee

8 Members (6-1-1-0)

Councillors - J Thomas (Chair)
M Arceno
K Choudhury
F Chowdhury
Rob Henry
L Martin-Haugh
R Parker, CC
S Speller

Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) (Employer Side)

3 Member (2-1-0-0)

Councillors - J Hollywell (Chair)
J Brown
R Parker, CC

Part I – Release to Press



Agenda item:

Meeting Council

Portfolio Area

Date 17 December 2025



DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE EXECUTIVE UNDER THE SPECIAL URGENCY PROVISIONS OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES (EXECUTIVE ARRANGEMENTS) (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2012

Author Victoria Wilders Monitoring Officer
Lisa Jerome Senior Democratic Services Officer

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Council of decision(s) taken by the Cabinet in accordance with the Special Urgency provisions of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. Council is recommended to note the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Council's Standing Order 43.1 require me, as Executive Leader, to submit an annual report to the Council on decisions taken by the Executive in pursuance of the Special Urgency provisions set out in Regulation 19 of the Regulations and in the Council's Standing Order 37.
- 3.2. Set out below are details of the Cabinet's decision taken since October 2025 in pursuance of the Special Urgency provisions referred to above:

| Date of Meetings | Subject | Decision(s) |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| 18 November 2025 | Reorganisation in Hertfordshire – Submission of Final Proposal | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The indicative resolution of Full Council be noted. 2. That the preferred Option C be approved to submit the proposal and identify the modified four unitary option (4UA modified) as preferred and request that the SoS formally modify the proposal by boundary changes as set out in the proposal. 3. That the report be endorsed and that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, having consulted with the Leader of the Council, to work with Hertfordshire County Council and District and Borough Councils to finalise and submit Hertfordshire's proposals for Local Government Reorganisation to Government by 28 November 2025. |
| | Town Centre Development Finance | That the recommendations set out in the Part II report be approved |

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 In accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules (the Rules) under the Constitution, the call-in procedure did not apply where the decision being taken by Cabinet is urgent (as was proposed in this case). On the 11 November, the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to disapply the call in procedure in respect of the Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire – Submission of Final Proposal report on the basis that the decision proposed was reasonable and proportionate in all the circumstances and to it being treated as a matter of urgency.
- 4.2 Under the Rules, the decision to disapply must be reported to the next available meeting of the Council together with the reasons for the urgency. The reason for the urgency was that if the decision were to be subject to call-in this might have impacted on the Council being able to submit its preferred unitary option and put its name to the final joint submission to Government by the deadline of 28th November 2025. If the Council was unable to submit its response on time due to any delay caused because of the call-in process, this would have been both prejudicial to the Council and the public.

- 4.3 In relation to the Town Centre Development Finance, the funding facility from Barclays to carry on construction on Claxton House needs to be in place in December to avoid expensive delays, as the site would have to be as construction at the site would have to be stopped and put on hold until funding is made available, then reactivated to resume works.

5. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1. None

Legal Implications

- 5.2 The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

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Part I – Release to Press



Agenda item: **##**

Meeting Council
Date 17 December 2025



2026 FLEXIBLE VOTING PILOTS

Lead Officer: Tom Pike ext. 2288

Author & Contact Officer: Luke Fattorusso ext. 2174

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 In its manifesto, the Government committed to encouraging greater participation in our democracy through modernising the voting experience; exploring ways to make the in person voting experience more efficient, more convenient, and better aligned with the expectations of today's electors.
- 1.2 To support this, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) invited applications from local authorities in England to pilot schemes at local elections in May 2026, with the objective of making voting in person more efficient, more convenient, and in line with the expectations of modern voters.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Council agree to participate in the Government's 2026 Flexible Voting Pilots, and that the 2026 the pilot submission will include:
 - a centralised voting hub based at the Council's offices in Daneshill House, available for all electors to vote at on Polling Day (in addition to their designated polling station); and,

- early in-person voting, commencing a week before Polling Day (on Thursday 30 April), to include the weekend and Bank Holiday Monday, at the same centralised voting hub as above. The proposed hours of poll would be from 9am to 7pm on weekdays and Saturday, and then from 10am to 4pm on Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday.
- 2.2 That authority is delegated to the Returning Officer to determine with MHCLG the necessary arrangements of the pilots; agreeing the final details for the pilots that will be administered in Stevenage.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In August, the government published an Electoral Modernisation Prospectus inviting Councils to apply to participate in the Governments 2026 Flexible Voting Pilots.
- 3.2 These flexible voting pilot schemes are designed to explore innovative approaches to voting that better reflect the needs and expectations of today's electorate. They aim to modernise the voting experience by introducing greater flexibility, improving accessibility and enhancing voter satisfaction while safeguarding the integrity, security and transparency of the democratic process.
- 3.3 The four principal areas that MHCLG invited Council's to pilot included:
- Voting at any polling station
 - Centralised Voting Hubs
 - Mobile polling stations
 - Early in-person voting
- 3.4 The overarching principal for these pilots to be administered and supported effectively is that they would be underpinned by digital Electoral Registers.
- 3.5 Following discussions and communication amongst key officers, the Leader of the Council, the Electoral Management Software and Electoral Print suppliers, and MHCLG, it was agreed to pursue an application piloting those areas as detailed in the recommendations.
- 3.6 The deadline for submission of applications provided by MHCLG was 22 September. Under the constitution, it is Council that approves the formal submission in respect of pilot schemes; however, as there was no Council meeting scheduled before the closing date of applications, it was agreed that an application would be submitted for consideration by MHCLG by this deadline, and that Council would then consider this at a subsequent meeting once more details had been determined.
- 3.7 Section 69 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 places a duty on Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers to take such steps as they think appropriate to encourage the participation by electors in the electoral process.
- 3.8 In undertaking these pilots, it will provide electors with greater accessibility and flexibility in the voting process. By utilising a Centralised Voting Hub at

the Council offices in the town centre, electors will have a central and familiar place to cast their vote in advance of Polling Day.

3.9 In addition, following the introduction of the new rules concerning postal vote applications, with electors now having to reapply every three years, it provides a broader range of options for voters to exercise their vote at these elections.

3.10 To create public awareness of the pilot, the Returning Officer will develop a detailed engagement plan, to include, but not limited to:

- Household Notification Letters (HNLs); these letters will be sent in February containing information on who is registered at the property and will be used to communicate information on the pilot via an insert.
- An Election Information letter sent with all Council Tax billing letters in March. This will provide information on the elections taking place and pilot.
- An advert to be included in the Spring addition of the Council's Chronicle magazine for publication in March.
- Dedicated pages will be available on the Council's website containing key election and pilot information.
- Social media messaging will be carried out on the Council's social media platforms on dates agreed and scheduled in advance.
- Posters will be displayed in a variety of areas across the Borough.
- An elector specific information page generated by a QR code will be printed on the Poll Cards.

3.11 The terms, success criteria and evaluation of the pilots will be decided by MHCLG in consultation with the Returning Officer. However, it is intended that we will gather information and evaluate on the following:

- Number of voters who use the early voting and centralised voting hub options
- How the above is broken down by Ward and Polling District Area
- Impact on elector turnout (i.e. whether turnout increases).

3.12 In addition, the Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to evaluate every electoral pilot scheme under section 10 of the Representation of the People Act 2000. The Commission will publish its evaluation framework once pilot applications have been approved, and this may include additional criteria beyond those set out in the legislation.

3.13 Should the pilot proceed, a further briefing will be provided to Members in the new year.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1 Section 10 of the Representation of the People Act 2000 allows for the Secretary of State to approve orders for local authorities in England and

Wales to run pilot schemes for innovative electoral procedures at local government elections.

- 4.2 Section 69 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 places a duty Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers to take such steps as he thinks appropriate to encourage the participation by electors in the electoral process.
- 4.3 Paragraph 17 of the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 permits councils to propose innovative electoral pilot schemes.
- 4.4 Under the Council's Constitution, it is Council that agrees participation and formal submission in respect of pilot schemes.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 Funding for the costs relating to the pilots will be provided by MHCLG. Indicative costings have already been provided to MHCLG, and further costs will be identified as part of ongoing processes between the Returning Officer and MHCLG. Software costs related to the pilot will be procured compliantly adhering to the Procurement Act 2023.

Legal Implications

- 5.2 The Representation of People Act 2000 grants the Secretary of State the power to authorise pilot schemes for local elections through Statutory Orders.
- 5.3 A Statutory Order must be made for each participating local authority. These Orders modify the existing legislation to permit the specific change being piloted and must reflect the exact nature of the innovation for the pilot to be legally compliant.
- 5.4 The preparation of these Orders is a detailed process, and will require close collaboration between the Returning Officer's team and MHCLG officials.
- 5.5 Failure to prepare an Order in good time, which includes providing sufficient time for the Electoral Commission to carry out their statutory consideration of draft Orders, would mean that a pilot scheme cannot proceed.
- 5.6 It is intended that the Statutory Orders will be in place and signed by January 2026.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Implications

- 5.7 All Councils anticipate further information on election arrangements in 2026, 2027, and 2028 related to the ongoing Local Government Reorganisation process.

Risk Implications

- 5.8 The Returning Officer, in consultation with the Head of Democratic Services, has considered the additional risks that participation in these pilots would involve; whilst additional resources will be required, it has been determined

that there would be sufficient capacity, with the appropriate funding and support from MHCLG, to undertake the specific pilot areas as outlined in the recommendations.

- 5.9 As is standard practice at elections, a comprehensive project plan and risk register will be in place taking into account the additional arrangements resulting from the Council's involvement in the flexible voting pilots. These will include resilience measures, including electronic system updated daily to create backups and paper documents updated.

Staffing and Accommodation Implications

- 5.10 It will be necessary to recruit additional staff to undertake these pilots, with additional training required in respect of the electoral register software that will be used to record electors voting in advance or at the polling stations.
- 5.11 Further, the Council will utilise its offices at Daneshill House to facilitate early voting. No issues are expected with this as Daneshill House is the central point of contact for the public and is used as a polling station on Polling Day.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.12 Whilst there are no equalities and diversity implications directly arising from the pilot, through the piloting of a Centralised Voting Hub based in the Town Centre and additional hours of poll in the days preceding the election, it will provide greater flexibility and accessibility for electors to cast their vote.

Information Technology Implications

- 5.13 These pilots will be underpinned by software operating digital electoral registers. These will be deployed onto laptops and operated by polling station staff. Having trialled elements of this technology in polling stations at previous elections, polling staff are familiar with this technology and thus the Council is positioned well to take this forward.
- 5.14 The pilots will also require that the devices used to host the electoral register software have access to a WIFI/internet connection, in order that the central hub and other polling station databases can connect to each other and the registers be updated in real time.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- BD1 Electoral Modernisation Prospectus: Flexible Voting Pilots 2026

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 3 September 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Carolina Veres (Chair), Lloyd Briscoe (Vice-Chair), Philip Bibby, Mason Humberstone, Ceara Roopchand and Tom Wren

Independent Member: Syed Uddin

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 6.30pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tom Plater and Anne Wells.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Audit Committee held on 3 June 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 SHARED INTERNAL AUDIT SERVICE - PROGRESS REPORT

Simon Martin (SIAS) presented the first internal audit progress report for 2025/26. He summarised work completed between April and August, including three finalised audits with positive assurance levels and two new medium priority recommendations. He confirmed there were no high priority recommendations outstanding and that performance indicators showed no risks to delivering an annual assurance opinion.

Members asked questions regarding the scope of the garages audit, particularly whether cleaning charges and validation of service delivery were included. Simon Martin agreed to confirm details outside of the meeting and provide further information for circulation to all Members.

Further questions concerned audit delivery progress and potential resourcing issues. Simon Martin advised that SIAS was currently at full establishment, and that delivery was scheduled flexibly throughout the year. He confirmed no risks to plan delivery.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Internal Audit Progress Report be noted, along with the status of critical, high and medium priority recommendations.

4 **ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW OF 2024/25 INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS**

The Assistant Director (Finance) presented the report, highlighting that all statutory and regulatory requirements had been met. Capital expenditure was £44.4m, lower than the £88.4m budget due to reprofiling, which also reduced borrowing requirements. General Fund borrowing was £4m and HRA borrowing nil. Investments totalled £46.1m, earning an average return of 4.95% and £2.3m in interest.

Members asked questions on:

- Potential increases in PWLB rates – the Assistant Director confirmed this was possible and would be monitored.
- Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) for the new multi-storey car park – the Assistant Director would confirm usage income outside of the meeting
- Strong investment performance – attributed to higher returns, reduced borrowing and prudent treasury management.
- Financing of capital expenditure – clarified that £9m of General Fund expenditure was met from grants and contributions rather than borrowing.

It was **RESOLVED** that the 2024/25 Annual Treasury Management Review, including the prudential indicators, be recommended to Cabinet for onward recommendation for approval by Council.

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

6 **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.
2. That having considered the reasons for the following items being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

7 **Q1 CORPORATE RISK REPORT**

The Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer presented the Q1 Corporate Risk Report.

Members asked questions that were responded to by the Corporate Performance and Improvement Officer.

8 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

At this juncture a Member commented that a number of Audit Committee Members were regularly offering apologies for lateness. The Member requested that consideration be given to starting Audit Committee meetings at a later time. The Chair agreed to consider the request.

CHAIR

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