

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 12 November 2025

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Richard Henry (Chair) (Chair), Myla Arceno, Rob Broom, Coleen De Freitas, Jackie Hollywell, Loraine Rossati, Simon Speller and Nigel Williams

Start / End Time: Start Time: 2.00pm
End Time: 3.20pm

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

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Tom Plater.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - CABINET 10 OCTOBER 2025**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 10 October 2025 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

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

Cabinet received a summary of the issues covered at the most recent meetings of the Environment and Economy Select and Overview and Scrutiny Committee including:

Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its September meeting had reviewed and asked questions regarding the decisions of the Cabinet and made some key observations regarding the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy and had raised concerns regarding pedestrian safety due to the installation of construction hoardings and following the revocation of the taxi rank on Danestrete.

Environment and Economy Select Committee had continued to work on its review of recycling in flat blocks and had also discussed the forthcoming mandated introduction of food waste collections which would significantly help to improve recycling rates.

Members thanked the Members of the Scrutiny Committees for their work and welcomed the scrutiny undertaken on these matters.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny and Select Committee meetings be noted.

4 **SECOND QUARTER MONITORING REPORT FOR GENERAL FUND, HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND CAPITAL MONITORING**

Cabinet received a report detailing the Quarter 2 2025/26 financial review which highlighted a stable overall position for the Council, with a marginal projected overspend of £1,380 in the General Fund, largely driven by targeted investments in capital resilience, staffing pressures, and inflationary impacts such as pay awards and insurance premiums.

Officers advised that the pressures were being offset by strong investment returns, increased income from commercial property recharges and fuel savings.

Members were informed that the Council remained within its delegated budget variation limits, with reserves and balances forecast to remain above minimum thresholds.

In relation to Capital, £10 million of expenditure had been rephased into future years and reflected revised delivery timelines for major housing and regeneration projects such as The Oval and Kenilworth. It was noted that the capital programme remained fully funded, with adjustments to financing reducing reliance on borrowing and revenue contributions due to higher-than-expected right to buy capital receipts.

The Strategic Director and CFO advised that the General Fund 2025/26 budget now reflected the increase in the pay award.

In relation to the Right to Buy receipts the Council had received, the Portfolio Holder for Housing advised that although tenants had the right to buy their Council properties, it was better for the Council to retain its council stock and retain the consequent rent revenue.

Members thanked the Officers involved in the budgetary process for the substantial work in producing the report.

It was **RESOLVED:**

General Fund

- 1 That the 2025/26 second quarter projected net increase in General Fund expenditure of £1,380 be approved;
- 2 That the use of EPR reserve funding for the initial supply of caddy liners, at a cost of £11,120 be approved;
- 3 That the proposed movement on reserves as detailed in paragraph 4.3.1 be noted;
- 4 That Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay (RCCO) of £150,000 to fund future urgent unplanned capital works be approved.

Housing Revenue Account

- 5 That the 2025/26 second quarter net decrease in HRA expenditure of

£164,550 be approved.

Capital Programme

- 6 That the General Fund capital budget re-phasing of £6.4 Million from 2025/26 to future years be approved;
- 7 That the Housing Revenue Account capital budget re-phasing of £3.6 Million from 2025/26 to future years be approved;
- 8 That net changes to budgets fully grant and external contributions funded of (£246K) in paragraph 4.9.2 be noted;
- 9 That General Fund virements in section 4.10 be approved;
- 10 That an additional £150K be added to the deferred works reserve funded by revenue contributions to capital in 2025/26;
- 11 That the proposed changes to the funding of the General Fund and HRA capital budgets in section 4.11 be approved.

5 MID YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2025/26 AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS

Cabinet received The Council's mid-year review of Treasury Management which confirmed that all activities had been conducted within the approved prudential and treasury indicators, with no breaches of borrowing or investment limits.

Members were advised that the Council would continue to monitor market conditions closely, particularly in light of inflationary pressures and potential interest rate volatility, to ensure financial sustainability and value for money in its treasury operations.

It was **RESOLVED** that the 2025/26 Mid-Year Treasury Management Review, revised Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and Prudential indicators report be recommended to Council for approval.

6 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2026/27

Cabinet received a report recommending retention of the current council tax support scheme for next year which for working aged claimants on maximum benefit, paying just 8.5% of their council tax bill.

Members noted that officers had looked at changing the scheme to a banded one to help those on Universal Credit whose income was assessed monthly to help reduce paperwork for residents but timing had not allowed this to be implemented ahead of next year.

Officers advised that the Council would need to consider whether to implement a scheme in 2027/28 or wait until Local Government Reorganisation is implemented in Hertfordshire depending on the timetable. The report detailed the very different Council Tax Support Schemes adopted across the County which could impact on residents once the new Unitary Authority was in place.

Members were pleased to note that elderly Council Tax Support (CTS) claimants

were protected in law from any restriction to the liability used in CTS calculations. Their awards would always be based on 100% of the council tax charge.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the current Council Tax Support scheme for 2026/27 be retained;
2. That the implementation of a Banded CTS scheme for 2027/28 be supported;
3. That a policy Overview and Scrutiny meeting be held in line with the review timetable to continue to consider a revised discount scheme as a result of the ongoing reduction in the number of Housing Benefit caseload due to the transitioning to Universal Credit;
4. That the directive contained in the Social Security Administration Act 1992 to disregard, in full, awards of War Widows, War Disablement and Armed Forces Compensation when determining entitlement for housing benefit and/or council tax support be re-approved.

7 BALANCING THE BUDGET 2026/27

Cabinet received a report - Balancing the Budget which gave an update on the savings identified in the September Medium Term Financial Strategy and identified some further savings for next year. The savings were based on a mix of efficiencies, commercial options and business change projects which meant there would be no service reductions.

It was also noted that the budget also recommended some growth for next year which included a one-off amount of £50,000 for celebrating the 80th Anniversary of the designation of Stevenage New Town.

Officers advised that to maintain financial stability, an annual savings target of approximately £400,000 would be required going forward, a lower figure than recent years. It was anticipated that regular reviews of fees and charges would generate the necessary funding to offset future targets.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance advised that as a result of the disruption caused by implementing the Herts County Council Active Travel improvements in the Old Town High Street it was proposed to introduce a one-hour of free parking at Church Lane North car park on Monday to Saturday between 06.00-16.00. This was estimated to cost £5,000 and would support the Old Town while a number of free parking bays were out of action.

Members welcomed the additional funding for the Town's 80th anniversary celebrations and looked forward to taking part in the events organised.

Following debate regarding the Old Town Parking, it was agreed that the consultation and deliberations on the parking issue with Ward Councillors, residents and businesses, had been extensive but a decision had been reached and welcomed on the one-hour free parking proposal which showed the Council's commitment to the High Street.

Members agreed to include an additional recommendation (7) to reflect this.

Officers were pleased to advise that the Government's announcement on the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funding to be spent on recycling and refuse services had been higher than expected which would allow the extension to the flat block recycling programme. The Fair Funding announcement was also expected to be made by the Government in December.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- 1 The Balancing the Budget options as set out in the report and Appendix A, totalling £84,640 (saving) for the General Fund 2026/27 (and £21,600 for the HRA) be approved and incorporated into the Council's budget setting processes;
- 2 That it be noted that the future savings target can be met from Fees and Charges as set out in paragraph 4.6.5 (subject to Government Funding, Local Government Reorganisation and unidentified growth);
- 3 The revised GF MTFS financial summary, as shown in section 4.9 to this report be noted;
- 4 That the completion of the Business rates for 2026/27 (NDR 1) be delegated to the Strategic Director (S151) after consultation with the Resources and Performance Portfolio holder (paragraph 4.3.4 refers).
- 5 That the Council's recognised unions be consulted regarding the proposed budget package;
- 6 That key partners and other stakeholders be consulted, and their views considered as part of the 2026/27 budget setting process.
- 7 That the introduction of 1 hour free parking at Church Lane North car park between Monday to Saturday 06.00-16.00 from January 2026 up until the completion of the Active Travel improvements in the Old Town High Street at an expected cost of £5,000 be approved.

8 **HRA BUSINESS PLAN**

Cabinet received a report giving an update on the updated Housing Revenue Account Business Plan for 2026/27 to 2056/57 setting out the Council's long-term vision and financial strategy for managing and maintaining council housing. The Plan provided a clear framework to ensure tenants homes remained safe, high-quality, and affordable, while supporting the delivery of new social and affordable housing to meet the needs of the community.

Members were pleased to note the significant investment programme including £148million investment into existing stock over the next five years, and £745 million over the next 30 years.

£457million was also allocated for new housing, with 281 homes currently under construction and a net increase of 1,107 homes projected over the lifetime of the plan.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing drew Cabinet's attention to two amendments to the HRA Business Plan that was published for the purpose of this meeting.

On page 48 of the pack, there were two values missing from the Income bullet point which should read 'rental income includes the impact of rent flexibility on relets and rent convergence with a £1 per week limit. Service charges and other income remain in line with inflation, if this were not to be approved, the 2026/27 year end reserves position would be **£209K** lower and the savings target for 2027/28 **£681K** higher.'

On page 49 of the pack, again, on the Interest bullet point, the last sentence had two figures represented by crosses and it should read as 'The average interest rate for the period 2025/26-2030/21 is **3.49%** and **3.75%** for new loans.'

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance advised that whilst the Council had ambitious plans for its homes, the HRA faced some challenges with higher inflation, repair costs and regulatory compliance.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2026/27-2026/57 as seen in Appendix A be approved;
2. That the approach to borrowing principles as set out in the Business Plan and summarised in paragraph 4.8 be approved;
3. That the minimum level of balances for the HRA Business Plan, which is set at £10Million be noted;
4. That the assumptions used for the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and that the growth and savings proposals (Appendix B & C) are incorporated into the 2026/27 budget be approved;
5. That the Capital Programme assumptions contained within the plan for the housing stock and new build properties be approved and that these be incorporated into the 2026/27 Capital Strategy;
6. That the financing of the Capital Programme for inclusion in the Capital Strategy including prudential borrowing to fund capital projects in 2026/27 of £35.6Million and re-financing of internal debt of 7Million be approved. Future years borrowing requirements will be considered annually in line with anticipated expenditure.
7. That the significant risks and uncertainties affecting the national housing landscape be noted and that delegated authority be granted to the Strategic Director (RP), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development, to make minor amendments as necessary to safeguard the financial viability of the Plan.

9 MANAGEMENT OF ESTATES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS POLICY 2025-2027

Cabinet received a report on the new Management of Estate and Neighbourhoods Policy which would help the Council achieve its ambition to make neighbourhoods safe, welcoming, and places that residents can truly take pride in.

It was noted that the policy would be subject to consultation and that the feedback received would be used to refine the policy to ensure it was transparent, inclusive and co-owned before it was formally adopted.

Members agreed that the policy was essential to the effective management of housing stock, estates and neighbourhoods and that as a co-operative council Members were committed to working with communities and not just for them. The concern regarding communal areas and the immediate environment was also supported.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- 1 That the adoption of the draft Management of Estates and Neighbourhoods Policy 2025-2027 (Appendix A), subject to consultation with tenants and leaseholders be approved;
- 2 That the relevant Strategic Director, after consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, be given delegated authority to make minor updates and changes to this policy.

10 **RECHARGE POLICY 2025 - 2027**

Cabinet received a report on the Council's Recharge policy which usually related to circumstances where the Council needed to perform duties or possibly take action due to residents' actions or perhaps inaction.

The report outlined a range of circumstances in which the recharges would apply while recognising that discretion might be exercised in cases where vulnerabilities, exceptional circumstances such as domestic abuse, or financial hardship was identified. The Policy would be supported by a clear decision-making process for staff

It was noted that before the policy was adopted, the Council would consult with tenants and provide accessible guidance to help residents understand when recharges might be applied and how they could be avoided, ensuring a fair and consistent approach for all.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- 1 That the adoption of the draft Recharge Policy 2025-2027 (Appendix A), be approved subject to consultation with tenants and leaseholders;
- 2 That the relevant Strategic Director, after consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, be given delegated authority to make minor updates and changes to this policy.

11 **ANNUAL REPORT AND EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ACTION PLAN - PROGRESS UPDATE**

Cabinet received the updated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan which included progress on the 18 targeted actions which had been designed to create a clear link between service delivery and EDI across the council.

The Portfolio Holder advised that key demographic information about both residents and the workforce was included in the report drawing on a range of data sources

including the 2021 census and the council's latest figures on benefit claimants and community safety. This information would be used to deepen the Council's understanding of the community and to shape services that better reflected the needs of the local population.

Members were also pleased to note that the council recently underwent an audit by the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS), receiving a 'Substantial Assurance' rating - the highest possible rating achievable which demonstrated the strength of the Council's EDI governance and a testament to the dedication and hard work of officers.

Members recognised the importance of recognising the needs of young people and also the needs of the major businesses in the Town which were at the forefront of the STEM industry.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the delivery of actions detailed in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan 2024–25 Progress Report (Appendix A), which contribute significantly to embedding and exemplifying Equality, Diversity and Inclusion principles throughout Stevenage Borough Council be acknowledged;
2. That the revised 19 actions in the 2025/26 version of the EDI Action Plan (Appendix B) be approved and endorsed to ensure future infrastructure is in place to support the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan's cross-cutting theme of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
3. That the publication of the latest annual Equality and Diversity Report for 2024/2025 (Appendix C) be approved and data utilised to help enhance community understanding, and shape services to represent the needs of the local population.

12 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

There was no urgent Part I business.

13 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED**:

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

14 **PART II MINUTES - CABINET 10 OCTOBER 2025**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 10 October 2025 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

15 **STATION GATEWAY**

The Cabinet considered a Part II report in respect of the Station Gateway.

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

16 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR