

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 11 February 2026

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

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

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

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

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Tom Plater and Nigel Williams.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - CABINET 14 JANUARY 2026**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 14 January 2026 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 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee including the Resident Survey and an urgent item related to the Submission to the Secretary of State regarding the request to delay the May 2026 local elections. The Committee then moved on to a scheduled work programme item examining the Council's Workforce.

Cabinet were pleased to note that over half the workforce lived locally and were aware of the Council's issues and aspirations. Members also welcomed the closing of the agenda pay gap.

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

4 **FINAL GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2026/27**

The Cabinet considered a report in respect of the Council's General Fund, Council Tax Support Scheme and proposals for the 2026/27 Council Tax for onward recommendation to Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance informed Cabinet that for the

current year, the budget had increased by £45,000. This included £30,000 of recommended growth to fund a post supporting the Stevenage Valour Hub bid. Looking ahead to 2026/27, she was pleased to advise that there was £589,000 of recommended growth bids, including:

- £189,000 to strengthen hardship support for residents through additional Discretionary Housing Payments and the Council Tax Hardship Fund;
- £210,000 to support skills and enterprise;
- £170,000 to improve our local environment; and
- £20,000 to increase local community budgets.

The Portfolio Holder advised that the Fair Funding position for Stevenage remained based on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, with the Final Settlement expected to be laid before Parliament imminently. She was pleased to report that the provisional figures were financially favourable for the town.

The proposed Council Tax increase for 2026/27 was 2.99%, equating to 14 pence per week for a Band D property, or 1 penny per week for working-age households in receipt of maximum support through the Council Tax Support Scheme.

The Portfolio Holder also advised that General Fund balances remained above the minimum required level of £3.65 million, leaving the Council in a resilient financial position to move towards Local Government Reorganisation. She stated that this increase, combined with improved funding, meant that the Council could address future budget gaps through annual fees and charges increases, while still investing in the theatre, neighbourhoods and town parks through revenue contributions to capital, ensuring continued support for residents and delivery of the Council's priorities.

The Strategic Director and Chief Financial Officer informed members that the Financial Settlement had been received on 9 February. She advised that there had been an increase of £83,120 for homelessness, rough sleeping and Domestic Abuse Services which was welcomed. She reiterated that the Council was in a strong position in terms of financial resilience.

Members welcomed the budget, in particular:

- The additional funding available for the environment supporting improvements to waste and recycling;
- funding to strengthen hardship support for residents;
- extra support for skills which would improve the life chances for many residents;
- the increase in Members' Local Community Budgets and the funding allocated to the 80th Anniversary celebrations.

The Strategic Director and Chief Finance Officer and her team were thanked for the work put in to this year's budget.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the 2025/26 revised net expenditure on the General Fund of **£10,585,490** as set out in paragraph 4.8.1 be approved.
2. That for 2025/26 the sum of £250,000 be transferred to the Capital earmarked reserve to support the Draft Capital Strategy as set out in paragraph 4.2.6 and be included in the revised net expenditure of £10,585,490.
3. The draft General Fund Budget for 2026/27 of **£13,587,330** be proposed, with a contribution to balances of **£241** and a Band D Council Tax of **£253.78**, (assuming a 2.99% Council Tax increase).
4. The updated position on the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as summarised in section 4.10 be noted.
5. The minimum level of General Fund reserves of **£3,648,355**, based on the 2026/27 risk assessment of balances, as shown at Appendix C to this report, be approved.
6. The contingency sum of **£500,000** within which the Cabinet can approve supplementary estimates (in addition to the General Fund net budget), be approved for 2026/27 (reflecting the level of balances available above the minimum amount). With a further **£500,000** approved specifically for additional Local Government Reorganisation transition costs if required.
7. The 2026/27 Balancing the Budget options as set out in section 4.5 and Appendix A of the report, totalling **£84,640** for the General Fund, be included into the Council's budget setting processes.
8. That the one-off growth bids of **£589,000** as set out in paragraph 4.6.5-4.6.6 and detailed in Appendix G be approved.
9. That the pressures identified in sections 4.2 and 4.7 to this report be noted.
10. That the 2026/27 Balancing the Budget growth options as set out in section 4.6 and Appendix B, totalling **£145,140 (and £95,140 from 2027/28)** for the General Fund, be included in the Council's budget.
11. That the sum set aside of Local Enterprise Board (LEP) loans of **£500,000** be approved for 2026/27 and for future years the amounts set out in paragraph 4.2.2 of the report.
12. That for 2026/27 the sum of **£1,200,000** be approved to support the Draft Capital Strategy as set out in paragraphs 4.2.5-4.2.7.
13. That for 2026/27 the use of **£500,000** Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funding for the purchase of two new freighters be approved as set out in paragraph 4.1.14 and also the use of EPR grant funded recycling initiatives of **£751,160** be approved as set out in Appendix F and paragraph 4.1.15.
14. That the sums included in the 2026/27 Budget for Local Government

Reorganisation (LGR) transition budgets of **£560,000** be approved and for future years as set out in paragraph 4.2.4.

15. That the ringfencing of **£2,000,000** of Business Rates gain reserves for the repayment of LEP loans as set out in paragraph 4.10.6 be approved.
16. That the Council Tax Support scheme for 2026/27 as set out in paragraphs 4.3.6-4.3.10 be approved.
17. That the Section 25 Statement on Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserve as set out in Appendix D be approved.
18. That the Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) for the 2026/27 General Fund budget be noted, (Appendix E) .
19. That the feedback on the budget from Overview and Scrutiny as set out in Para.4.13.1 and public consultation in section 4.14 be noted.

5 **FINAL CAPITAL STRATEGY 2025/26 TO 2029/30**

The Cabinet considered a report in respect of the Capital Strategy 2025/26 – 2029/30 for onward recommendation to Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance advised that the final Capital Strategy set out a £118 million investment programme for 2025/26 to 2029/30, including £7.9 million of new capital growth bids which were recommended following detailed review by Officers and the Council's Cross Party, Financial Security Group (CFSG).

The Strategic Director and Chief Finance Officer advised that the ability to invest in capital was as a result of the fair funding deal and that a significant amount of the Council's borrowing related to the self financing deal and the 30 year Business Plan. She was pleased to report that the improved financial position allowed improvements in assets such as the Theatre to be funded.

The Strategy also highlighted ongoing risks, including reliance on capital receipts, volatility in construction costs, and potential constraints arising from Section 24 in the context of Local Government Reorganisation.

Members welcomed the 27 supported schemes and endorsed the overall funding approach, which together safeguarded key operational assets, maintained financial resilience, and ensured the deliverability of the Council's longer-term regeneration objectives.

In particular, Members welcomed:

- The replacement of the Ridlins athletic running track;
- Improvements to the Gordon Craig Theatre including carpets and lighting;
- The new Sports and Leisure Centre;

- The proposed new sign for Fairlands Valley Park;
- Refurbishment of play equipment across the Town.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the final General Fund growth bids identified for inclusion in the Capital Strategy (section 4.2, and Appendix A to the report) be approved totalling £7.9Million for 2026/27-2028/29.
2. That the Final General Fund Capital Budget for 2025/26 to 2029/30 of £118Million, as set out in Appendix B to the report be approved.
3. That the forecast of and approach to resourcing the General Fund capital programme as outlined in the report (Paragraph 4.4) be approved.
4. That the revenue contribution to capital, 2026/27 to 2028/29 as set out in table 4, paragraph 4.3.4 be approved of £4.6Million to fund the capital programme.
5. That the proposed use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) contributions of £225k as set out in section 4.6 be approved.
6. That the approved revenue surplus in any year of up to £500K that can be allocated to the capital reserve to support capital expenditure be noted.
7. That the comments from Council Financial Security Group and Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in section 4.11 be noted.
8. That the legal implications of Section 24 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 in relation to financial decisions (capital) made by a council that is due to be abolished or reorganised in section 5.2 be noted.

6 **STEVENAGE BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN PARTIAL UPDATE: MAIN MODIFICATIONS FOLLOWING EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC HEARINGS**

Cabinet received a report giving a comprehensive update on the Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update as it progressed through the statutory Examination in Public.

Members were reminded that the Local Plan was the Council's primary planning document, which set out the spatial strategy, development requirements and land use policies that guided growth, regeneration, infrastructure delivery and environmental protection over the plan period to 2031. Maintaining an up-to-date Local Plan was essential to ensure that planning decisions remained robust, defensible, and aligned with both national policy and the Council's corporate priorities.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment advised that the modifications, which were necessary to ensure that the updated Plan met the legal and policy tests of soundness focussed on clarifying:

- the climate change and sustainable development policies,
- that the housing and employment requirements from the adopted 2019 Plan remain unchanged; and
- ensuring updated policy wording is both evidence based and deliverable.

He advised that additional changes responded directly to issues explored during the Examination, including flexible application of new climate policies, updated housing accessibility standards, and consistency with national guidance.

Members thanked the Officers involved for their work on this matter which represented the final statutory stage required before the Inspector issued their binding report on adoption.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the proposed changes to the Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update, as set out in Appendix A and B, following Examination in Public in order to make the Plan sound be approved.
2. That the Main Modifications as set out in Appendix A and B be approved and be subject to public consultation for 6 weeks, as directed by the Planning Inspector.

7 **ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2026/27**

Cabinet received a report on the Annual Treasury Management Strategy for 2026/27 which set out how the Council would manage its borrowing, investments and cash flow in full accordance with CIPFA's Codes.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance was pleased to advise that the Council's investment performance remained strong, with average returns of 5.27% achieved up to December 2025.

The Strategy set out the Council's borrowing position and future borrowing requirements and Members were advised that throughout the year, the Council remained within all prudential and counterparty limits, with no breaches reported. The report confirmed full compliance with all legislative and best-practice requirements and highlighted the continued importance of Member training and the prudent management of interest rate and refinancing risks.

It was **RESOLVED** that following consideration by the Audit Committee and the Cabinet, the 2026/27 Treasury Management Strategy be recommended to Council for approval.

8 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

9 **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.

10 **WRITE OFFS OVER £10K**

The Executive considered a Part II report in respect of Write Offs over £10k.

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

11 **GRANT OF AN OPTION AGREEMENT FOR THE SALE OF LAND**

The Executive considered a Part II report in respect of an Option Agreement for the sale of land.

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

12 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR