

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 16 December 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Jim Brown (Chair), Philip Bibby, Leanne Brady, Kamal Choudhury, Peter Clark, Alistair Gordon, Ellie Plater and Ceara Roopchand

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 6.45pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sandra Barr, Stephen Booth, Robert Boyle, Akin Elekolusi and Lynda Guy.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Part I Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 19 November 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 MINUTES OF THE INFORMAL MEETINGS 26 NOVEMBER 2025 AND 1 DECEMBER 2025

The Chair noted the work which the Committee completed on Corporate Communications and Member Enquiries.

A question was raised regarding the LGA report which was discussed at the meeting and would be circulated to the Committee.

The minutes of the informal meetings held on 26 November 2025 on corporate communications and 1 December 2025 on member enquiries were agreed.

The Chair raised a question regarding discussions which took place at the previous meeting, regarding the accuracy of one of the demographic figures in the equalities report, and officers noted that this would be followed up and reported back to the Committee. It was noted there was no formal reporting to Cabinet and that officers took forward the points raised for further consideration and action.

Members thanked Officers for their work with the informal meetings.

4 PART I DECISIONS OF THE CABINET - COUNCIL TAX BASE 2026/27

Cabinet received a report seeking approval of the Council Tax Base for 2026/27.

Members noted that the proposed tax base represented an increase of 239.76 Band D equivalents compared to 2025/26, reflecting growth in new properties and changes to discounts, and that the revised tax base would inform the January 2026 budget-setting process and support the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

The Committee noted the decision of Cabinet.

5 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT DRAFT BUDGET AND RENT SETTING 2026/27**

Cabinet received a report on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget and rent setting proposals for 2026/27, to be considered by Council on 21 January.

The report set out the proposed rent levels and service charges, based on a CPI plus 1% assumption (4.8%), resulting in average weekly increases of £6.72 for social rents and £8.85 for affordable rents. Members were advised that a minimum reserve of £10 million had been maintained in line with the Business Plan to manage financial risk.

It was noted that the HRA report was presented ahead of the General Fund report and that some outstanding issues remained, including General Fund recharges and potential building compliance pressures. These items were expected to move the forecast position from a surplus of approximately £700,000 to a deficit, aligning the position with the HRA Business Plan.

An assumption relating to rent convergence had been included in the budget, although this would be removed if no Government announcement was made before Council in January.

Members questioned rent policy, affordability and financial risks within the HRA, including the impact of CPI plus 1% increases, properties below formula rent, potential EPC upgrade costs and increasing voids and bad debt provision. In response, it was explained that the HRA was highly dependent on rental income and that increases in voids or rent arrears posed significant risks to both revenue and capital programmes, with additional pressures arising from cost-of-living impacts.

Members also discussed the long-term impact of rent increases on affordability and Right to Buy (RTB) activity. It was noted that changes to the RTB discount had previously resulted in increased sales. However, it is expected that RTB would now remain lower than the peak and would be around 30 a year. The main inflationary pressure will come from the cost of repairs.

Despite national rent increases, Members were advised that social rents remained significantly lower than private and affordable rents, and that around half of tenants received Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, helping to mitigate affordability concerns.

The Committee noted the decision of Cabinet.

6

PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - RELOCATION OF THE LISTER HOSPITAL TAXI RANK

Cabinet received a report seeking approval to revoke the existing taxi rank at the Lister Hospital on Coreys Mill Lane, Stevenage, and to designate a new taxi rank approximately 35 metres from the current location, in accordance with Section 63 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

Members noted that the new rank would accommodate four vehicles, maintain safe pedestrian access to the hospital, and would be constructed prior to the removal of the existing rank to ensure continuity of service.

Cabinet also noted that a 28-day public consultation had been undertaken, resulting in one public response and no objections from the taxi trade or other stakeholders.

It was noted that Councillor Kamal Choudhury declared an interest in this item due to being a Taxi Driver.

A question was raised regarding where the temporary taxi rank would be located, and officers reported that it was shown in Appendix E of the report.

The Committee noted the decision of Cabinet.

7

PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - CORPORATE PERFORMANCE - QUARTER 2 2025/26

The Committee noted that the Chief Executive presented a report to Cabinet highlighting key achievements and progress of the Corporate Plan. This included the recruitment of eight new apprentices at the Council, new artwork at the bus interchange, planning permission granted for the new sports and leisure centre and progress on the construction of Claxton House.

Members were also advised that a further report on the Resident Perception Survey would be presented to Cabinet in January, noting that overall satisfaction remained high at 83%.

A question was raised regarding whether customer satisfaction with complaint handling was an appropriate performance measure. Members suggested that the proportion of complaints which were upheld or not may provide a more meaningful indicator. Members were advised that this was under review and being considered.

Members raised an interest in the response rates from the survey from younger residents, specifically those under 25 and under 35.

The Committee noted the decision of Cabinet.

8

PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - DIGITAL STRATEGY

It was noted that Cabinet received and approved the Digital Strategy for the period 2025–2028, which set out how the Council would develop and improve online

services to enable residents to access digital services more efficiently. The strategy outlined how technology would be used over the next three years, building on existing progress to improve online access to services and provide staff with better digital tools.

Members were advised that the strategy aimed to strengthen organisational resilience, build digital confidence across the workforce and ensure digital inclusion so that no residents were left behind as services were modernised.

The importance of improving the Council's website and digitising records was highlighted, particularly in the context of local government reorganisation.

Members noted some concerns with the strategy, particularly with those residents who could not use digital channels of communication with the Council, to see what the impact of the strategy would be on them. It was noted that discussions would take place after the meeting with members and officers to discuss this further.

At this juncture, Councillor Alistair Gordon declared an interest as a service user of the allotments.

A question was raised regarding the change to issuing allotment invoices by email without prior notification to service users. Officers acknowledged the feedback and thanked Members for bringing the matter to the Committee. It was noted that the issue would be fed back to the relevant officers.

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

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

10 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

11 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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.

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

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19 December 2025 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

13 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE CABINET - LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT - AGENCY PROPOSAL**

The Assistant Director of Finance informed the Committee about the Leisure Management Contract – Agency Proposal.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

14 **PART II DECISION OF THE CABINET - THE PROVISION OF FIRE DOOR INSTALLS, INSPECTIONS AND REMEDIAL WORK TO FLAT FRONT ENTRANCES AND COMMUNAL FIRE DOORS**

The Assistant Director for Building Safety and Housing Property Services informed the Committee of the report in respect of the provision of fire flat door installs, inspections and remedial work to flat front entrances and communal fire doors.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

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

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

16 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR