



## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Date: Tuesday, 20 January 2026**

**Time: 6.00pm,**

**Location: Council Chamber - Daneshill House, Danestrete**

**Contact: Gemma O'Donnell 01438 242216**

**committees@stevenage.gov.uk**

Members: Councillors: Jim Brown (Chair), Andy McGuinness (Vice-Chair), Sandra Barr, Phil Bibby, Stephen Booth, Robert Boyle, Leanne Brady, Kamal Choudhury, Peter Clark, Akin Elekolusi, Alistair Gordon, Lynda Guy, Ellie Plater and Ceara Roopchand

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### AGENDA

#### **PART 1**

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

**2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16 December 2025.

5 – 10

**3. STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL WORKFORCE PRESENTATION**

Members are invited to receive a presentation to consider the Committee's work programme item regarding the Council's Workforce.

11 – 34

**4. PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT FINAL BUDGET AND RENT SETTING 2026/27**

To consider the decision of the Cabinet on the proposals for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budgets and rent setting for 2026/27, to be considered by Council on 21 January 2026.

Notice of Decisions to follow in separate document.

35 – 92

**5. PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - DRAFT GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2026/27**

To consider the decision of the Cabinet on the Council's draft 2026/27 General Fund



Budget, Council Tax Support Scheme and draft proposals for the 2025/26 Council Tax.  
93 – 152

**6. PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - DRAFT GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY 2025/26 TO 2029/30**

To consider the decision of the Cabinet to approve revisions to the 2025/26 Capital Programme and Strategy and approve the draft 2026/27 Capital Programme.  
153 – 178

**7. PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - 2025 RESIDENTS SURVEY FINDINGS**

To consider the decision of the Cabinet on an overview of the key findings from the 2025 Residents Survey, which was undertaken independently by an external research agency over a five-week period between May and June 2025.  
179 – 218

**8. URGENT PART I DECISIONS OF THE CABINET - LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION AND LOCAL ELECTIONS 2026**

To consider the decision of Cabinet on the potential postponement of their local election in May 2026 following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper.  
219 – 230

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

To consider any urgent Part I Decisions authorised by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**10. URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

To consider any Part I business accepted by the Chair as urgent

**11. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

To consider the following motions:

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 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 Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

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

To approve as a correct record the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16 December 2025.

**13. URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE**



## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

To consider any urgent Part II Decisions authorised by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

### **14. URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

To consider any Part II business accepted by the Chair as urgent



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## 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



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**



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# Overview and Scrutiny Jan 2026

## SBC Workforce





# Introduction

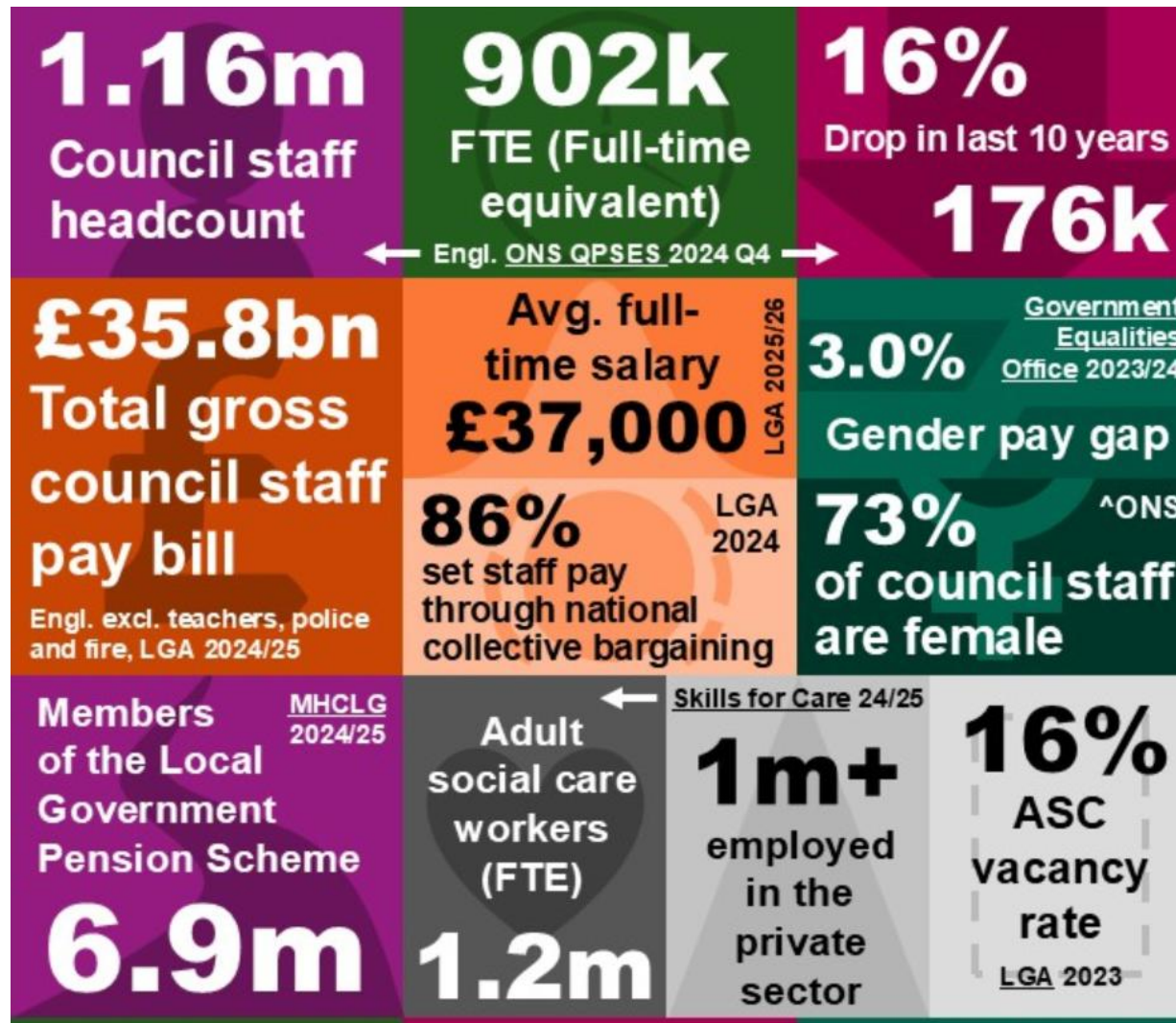
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## Agenda

1. National picture on the public sector
2. SBC staff key stats and figures
3. Ensuring SBC attracts and retains the best workforce
4. How we engage our staff
5. What our staff tell us
6. Inclusion
7. LGR



# National Local Government Context





# Stevenage Borough Council staff facts and figures

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# Stevenage Borough Council

Annual pay bill  
is £41.5M

Workforce of  
702  
headcount,  
663.5 FTE

615 staff are  
permanent  
and 87 on fixed  
term contracts

Workforce  
Stability >85%

Gender split of  
workforce is  
53% female  
and 47 male

Gender Pay  
Gap of -0.98 –  
improving  
trend

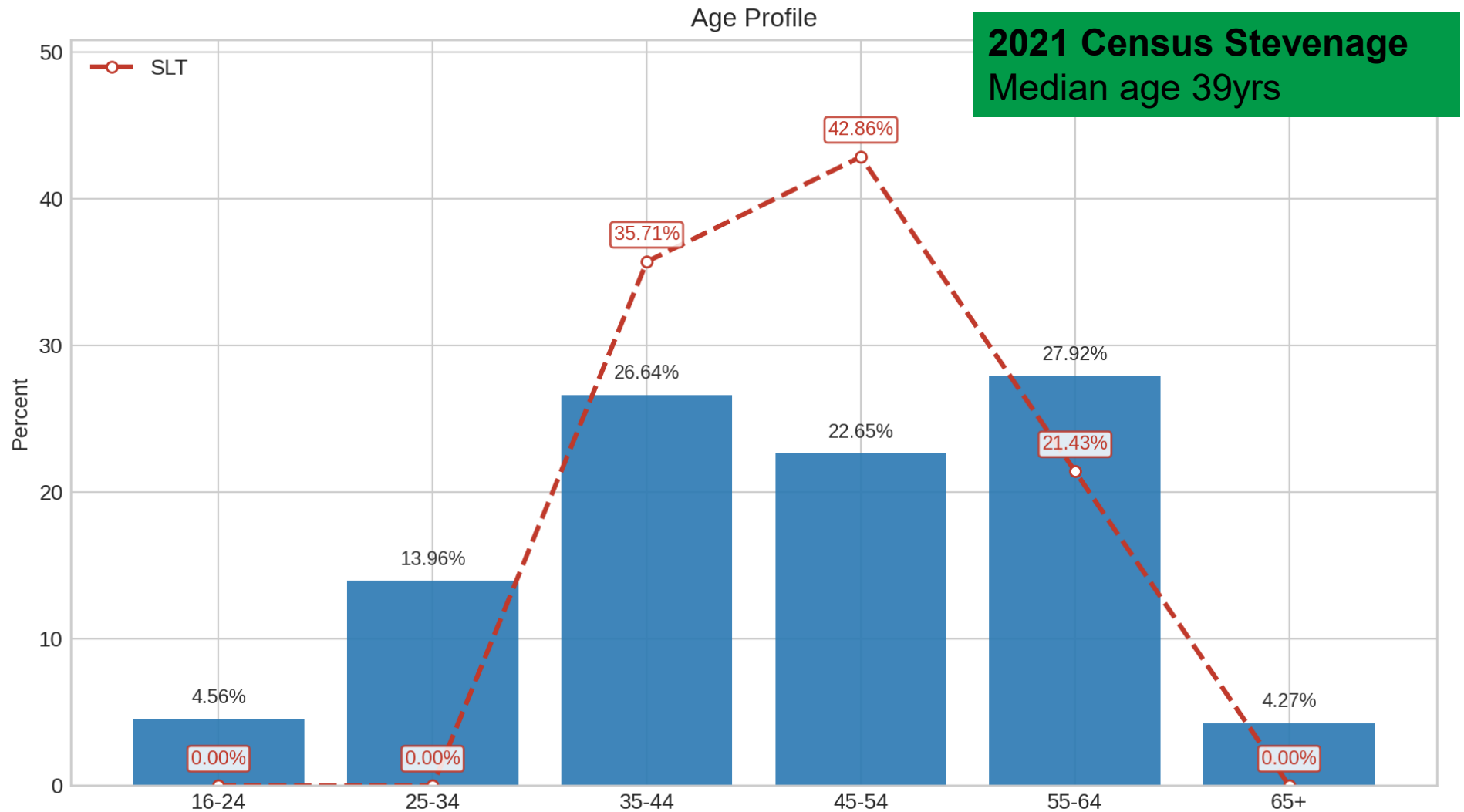
We follow  
national pay  
scales and pay  
bargaining

We committed  
as a national  
living wage  
employer

51% of  
workforce live  
in SG1/SG2

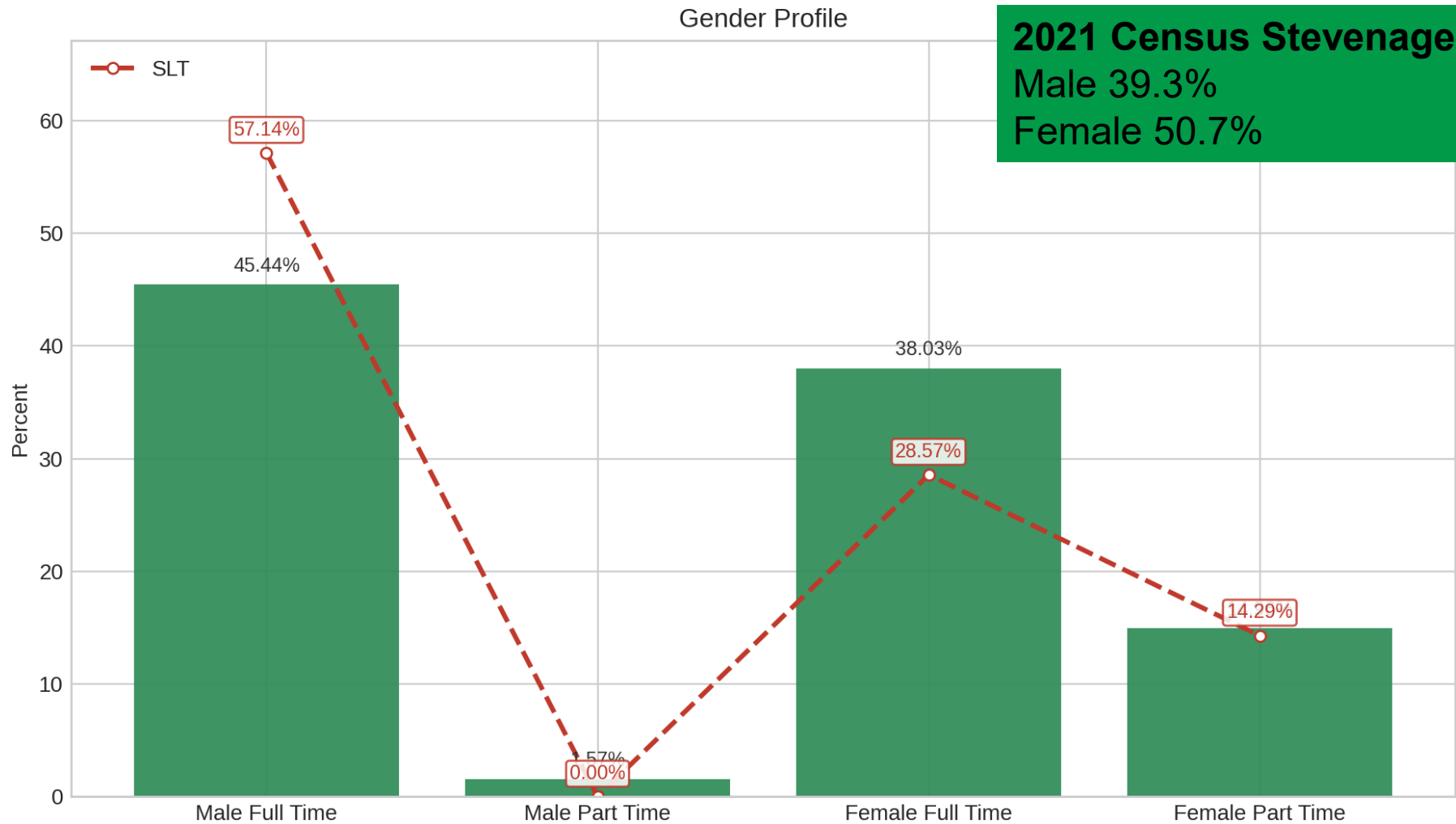


# Workforce Demographics



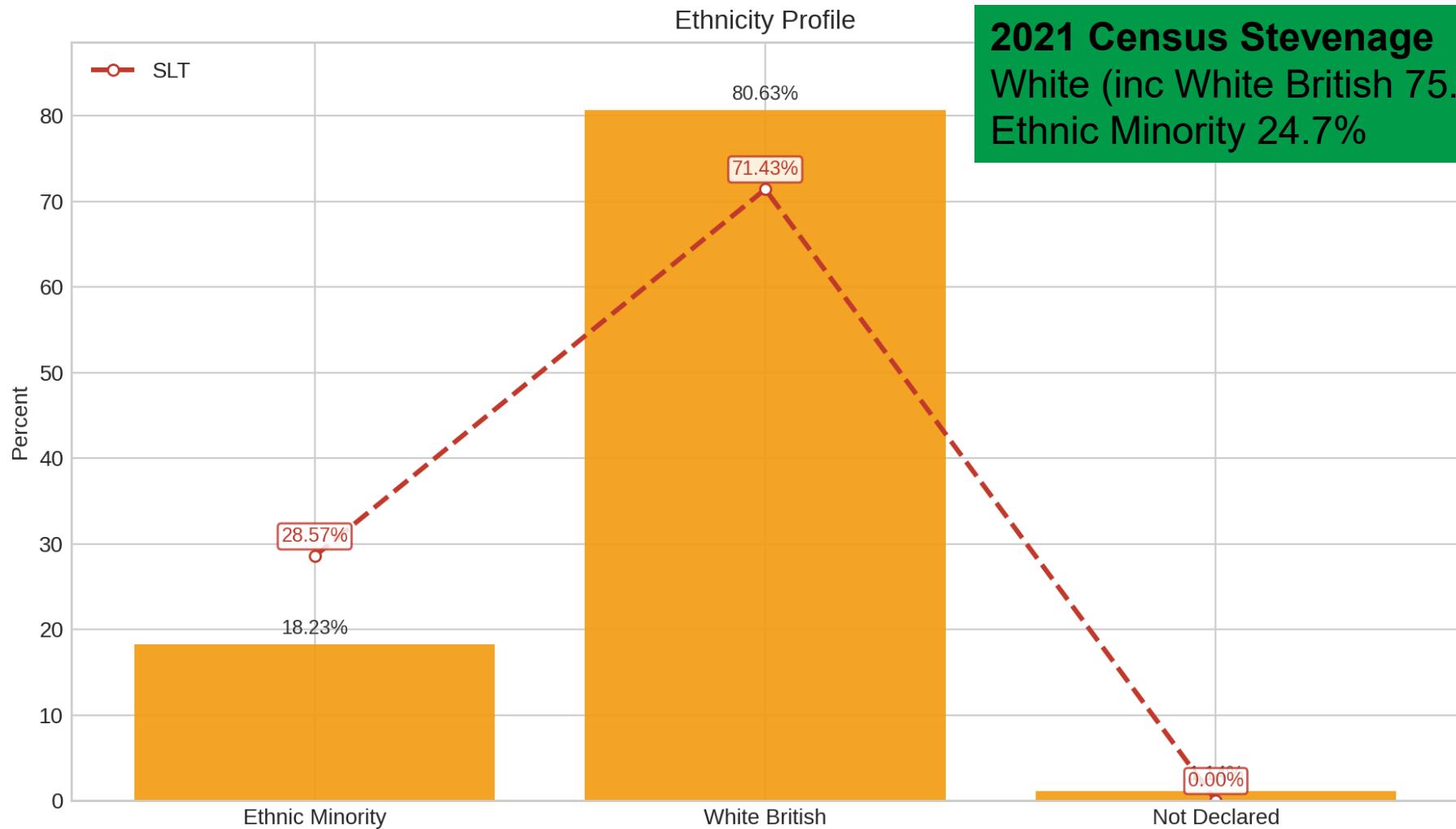


# Workforce Demographics





# Workforce Demographics



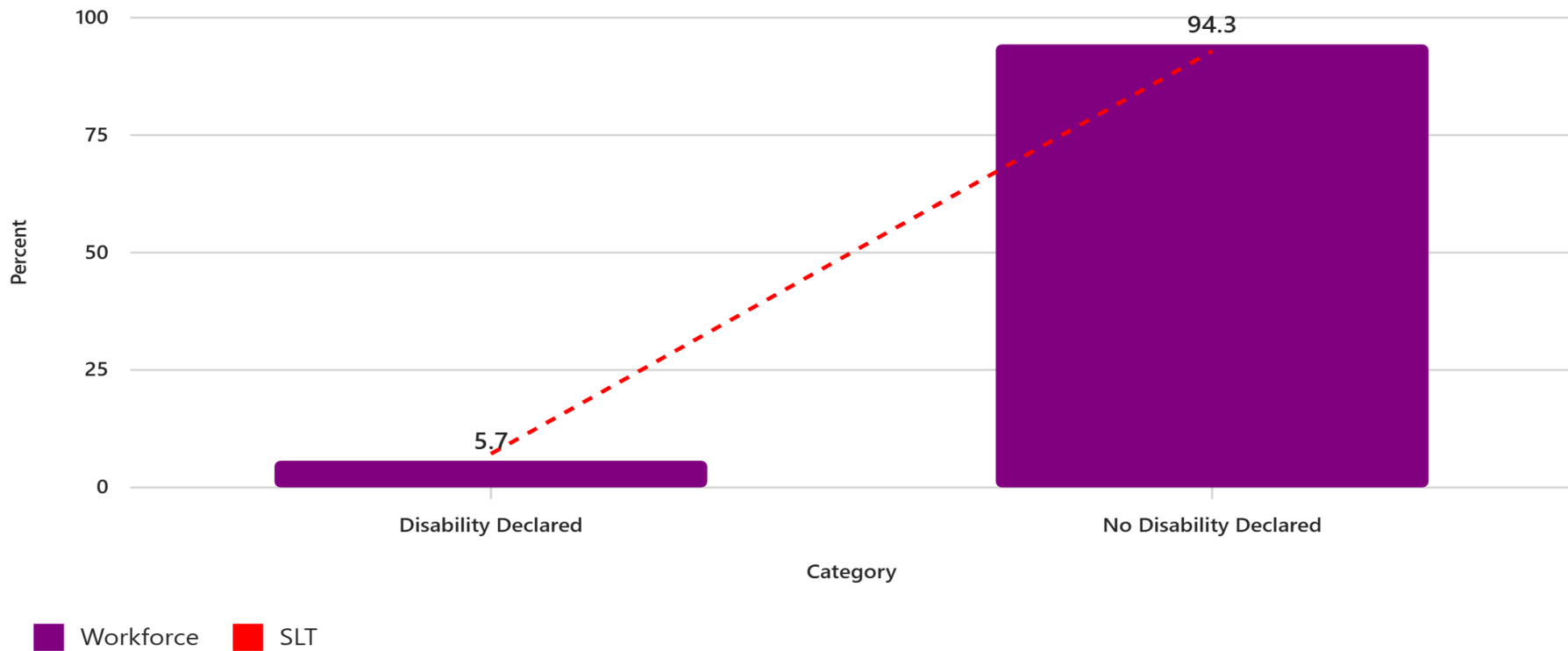
**2021 Census Stevenage**  
White (inc White British) 75.3%  
Ethnic Minority 24.7%



# Workforce Demographics

## Disability Profile

**2021 Census Stevenage**  
Disability Declared 18.7%  
No Disability Declared 81.3%

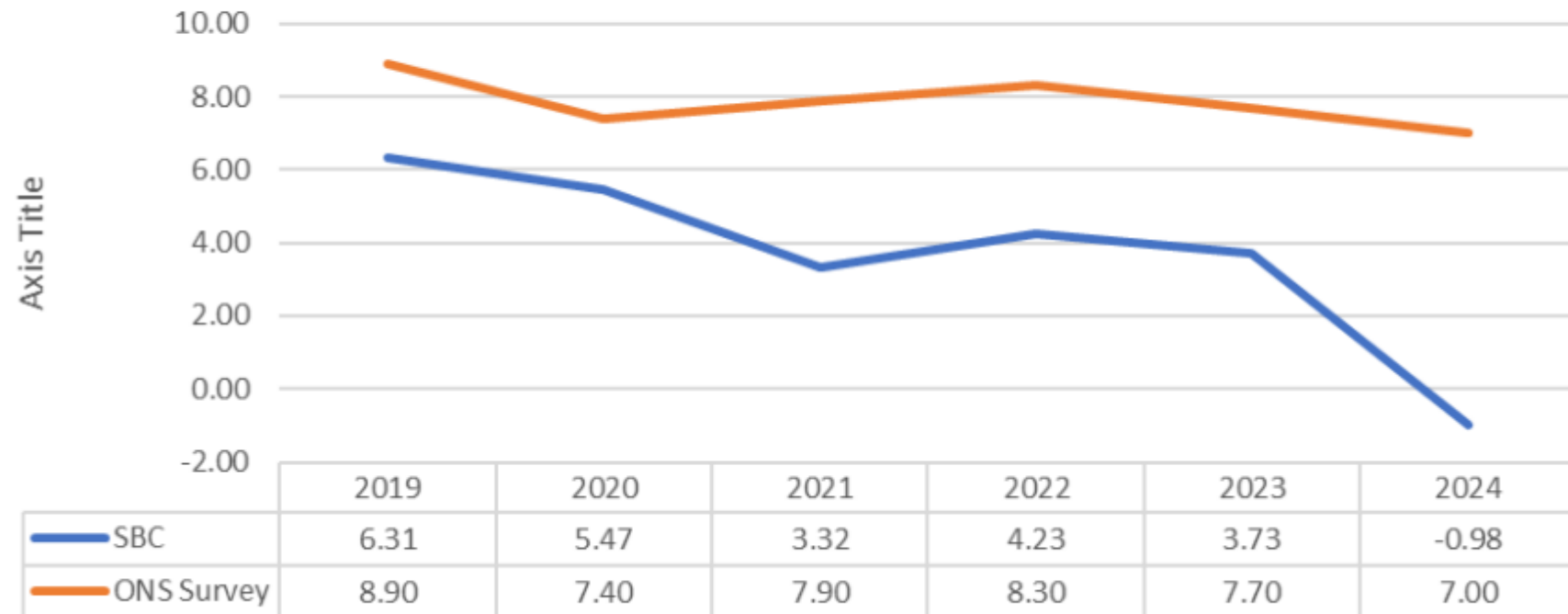




# Gender Pay Gap

Government  
Equalities  
Office 2023/24  
**3.0%**  
Gender pay gap

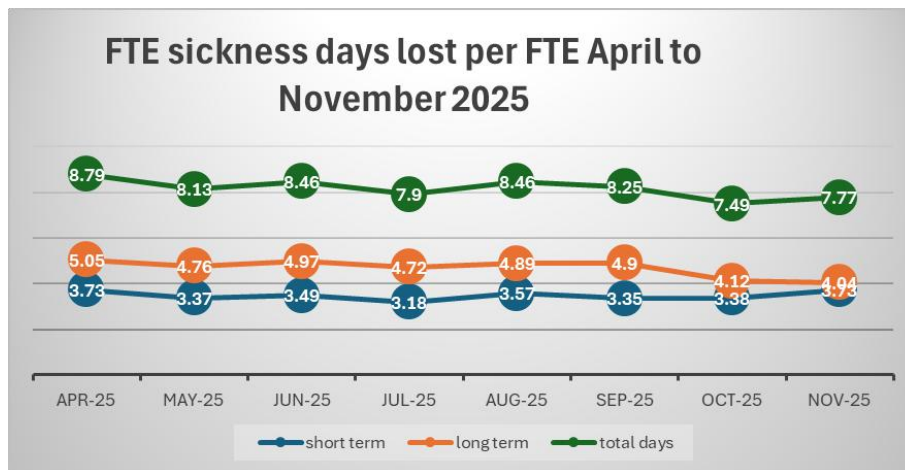
Mean gender pay gap analysis





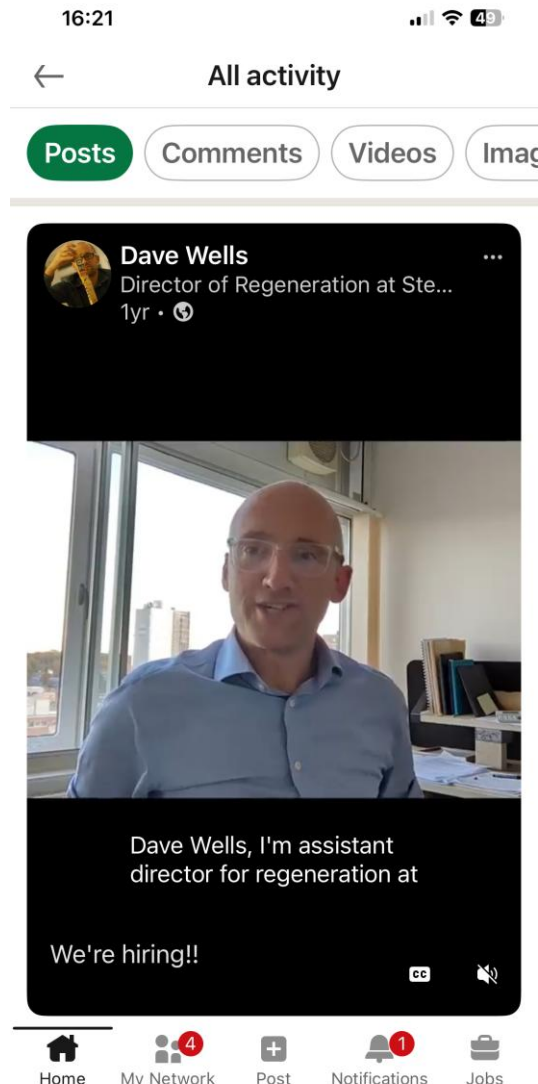
# Sickness Absence

- Sickness absence has improved and is now **below target at 7,7 days**, performing better than **public sector average (8.2 days)**. Particularly positive given the time of year and in house waste and recycling services, where national average is 13.7 days





# Attracting and retaining Talent at SBC

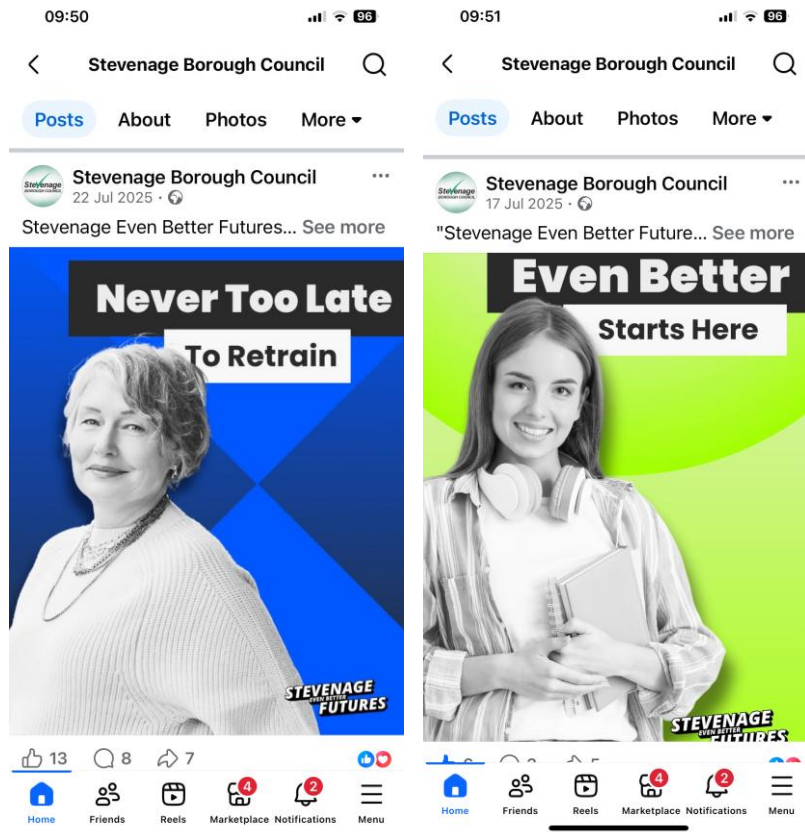




# Attracting and retaining the best people

- KPI's – stability, time to recruit, agency
- Talent Manager impact
- Social Media Presence – videos
- Online recruitment platform
- Inclusive recruitment processes
- Apprenticeship Programme
- Work Experience
- Hard to fill posts

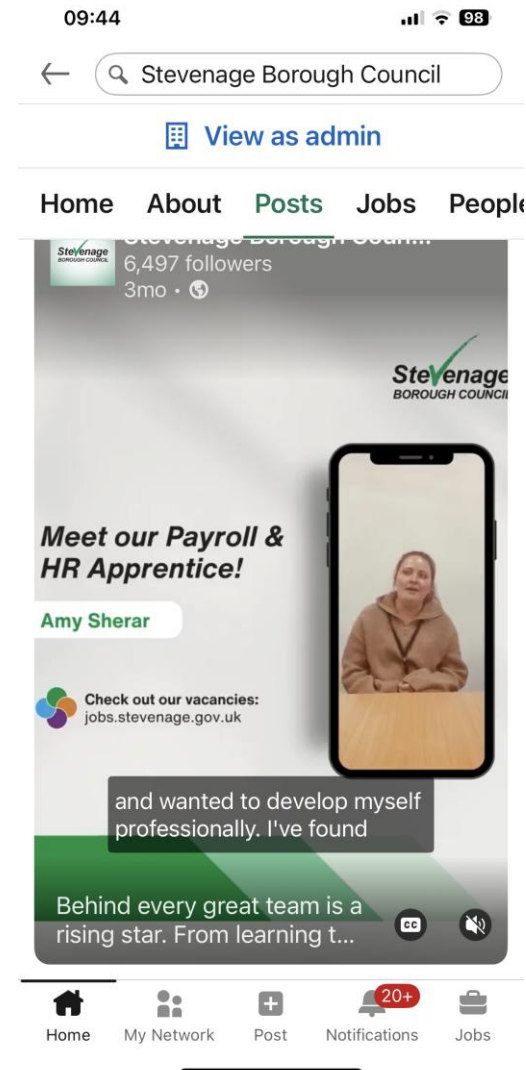
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# Organisational Development

- Leadership Development Programmes for all levels
- Intern Programme with UoH
- Maximising Apprentice levy
- Preparing for LGR
- Digital Skills





# How we communicate with our staff





# Engagement and Communication

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ANNUAL STAFF  
SURVEY



STAFF AWARDS



GOOD TRADE  
UNION  
RELATIONS



REGULAR ALL  
STAFF CALLS



REGULAR  
STAFF ONE TO  
ONES



EXIT  
INTERVIEWS



# Staff Survey Insights 2025

## Strengths vs Critical Areas

Planning to stay 89%

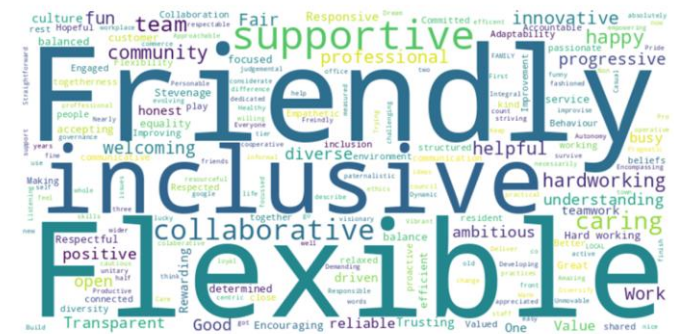
Authentic self 84%

Development opportunities 83%

IT skills 88%

Response rate 43%

Harassment experienced 12%





# Staff Survey Actions 2025

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Anon reporting tool created and promoted at many staff events

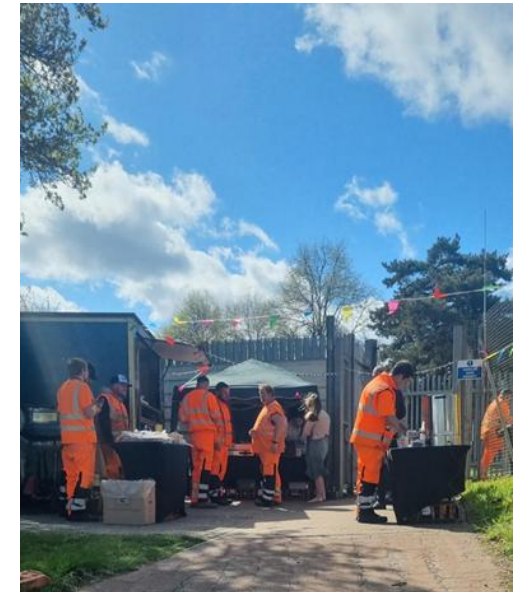
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Most staff completed prevention of sexual harassment training

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Promotion of having Real Conversations – setting objectives and early issue intervention

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# Inclusion and Wellbeing

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# Inclusion and Wellbeing

- **Officer Equality Group** staff-led EDI action and communications
-  **Disability Confident Employer**
-  **Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA)** applied to key decisions
-  **Anonymised recruitment** names/equality data hidden at shortlisting
-  **Redeployment & reasonable adjustments** – support for disabled colleagues
-  **ED&I training** – Equality Act, dignity at work, neurodiversity e-learning, dementia friendly
-  **Multi faith room** - prayer and relaxation and has access to a cupboard for storage, water for cleaning, frosted glass windows for privacy and a rack for shoes





# The LGR word (s)



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# Preparing for Local Government Reorganisation

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Hertfordshire wide workforce workstream established



Workforce is a priority



Early staff comms and engagement



Change readiness already started



Trade Unions engaged



Learning and Development



Learning from others



# Questions

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**Meeting** CABINET / COUNCIL

**Portfolio Area** Housing and Housing Development /  
Resources and Performance

**Date** 14 JANUARY 2026 / 21 JANUARY 2026



## FINAL HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET SETTING AND RENT REPORT 2026/27

### KEY DECISION

**Authors** Keith Reynoldson; Atif Iqbal

**Contributor** Ash Ahmed; Andrew Garside; Clare Fletcher; Denise Lewis;  
Richard Protheroe; Kerry Clifford

**Lead Officers** Richard Protheroe; Clare Fletcher

**Contact Officer** Keith Reynoldson; Atif Iqbal

### 1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. To update Members on the proposals for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budgets and rent setting for 2026/27, to be considered by Council on 21 January 2026.
- 1.2. To update Members on the formula for setting rents for 2026/27 and to propose 2026/27 HRA rents and service charges.
- 1.3. To update Members on the final 2026/27 HRA budget, incorporating budget amendments identified since the December 2025 Cabinet report and the decisions included in the HRA Draft Budget Report that was approved at the Cabinet meeting on the 10 December 2025.
- 1.4. To update Members on the 2026/27-2030/31 HRA Capital Programme for approval and incorporating any budget amendments identified since the December 2025 Cabinet report.



## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the following proposals be recommended to Council on 21 January 2026:

- 2.1 That HRA dwelling rents be increased (week commencing 1 April 2026) by 4.8%. This equates to an average increase of £5.89 for social rents, £8.85 for affordable rents and £7.29 for Low Start Shared Ownership homes per week (based on a 52-week year), subject to the Government not publishing rent regulations on rent convergence allowing an additional £1 per week for un-converged homes.
- 2.2 That Members approve the implementation of rent convergence for 2026/27 rents (as set out in the December Draft Budget report and paragraph 4.1.6 of this report), if regulations are published by the date of the Full Council meeting in January 2026.
- 2.3 That the 2026/27 service charges are approved as set out in paragraph 4.2.
- 2.4 That the HRA budget for 2026/27, set out in Appendix A, is approved.
- 2.5 The 2026/27 growth options as set out in section 4.4 are approved.
- 2.6 That the changes from the draft budget in section 4.6 are approved.
- 2.7 That the 2026/27 Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix B are noted.
- 2.8 That the revised minimum levels of balances for 2026/27 shown in Appendix C are approved.
- 2.9 That Members approve the Rent Increase Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIA) appended to this report in Appendix D.
- 2.10 That the Capital Strategy detailed in Appendix E is approved, including total spend for 2026/27 of £75.6Million and borrowing to finance capital schemes of £35.6Million.
- 2.11 That an additional £1.5Million budget is added to the 2025/26 capital programme, detailed in section 4.8.3, to enable the purchase of 5 additional homes in the Shephall View scheme, to be funded by a budget virement of £330K from the Oval scheme and the remainder from grant from Homes England.
- 2.12 That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (RP), following consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Housing and Housing Development and Resources & Performance, to complete final negotiations for the purchase of the additional properties, within the agreed total budget.
- 2.13 That the contingency sum of £500K, within which the Cabinet can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2026/27.
- 2.14 That Members note the comments made by the overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of its work in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework rules in the Council's Constitution.





## **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is a legally ring-fenced account that records all income and expenditure associated with the management and operation of the Council's housing stock. The main costs within the HRA include housing







management, maintenance, depreciation (which helps fund capital works), and interest on loans. The account is primarily funded through rental income, which represents the majority of HRA revenue. Any surplus generated is retained within the ring-fenced account and used to support capital investment or offset future deficits. Under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (Section 76), the Council is legally required to set a balanced HRA budget and cannot plan for a deficit on the fund.

- 3.2 The latest update to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan was presented to Cabinet in November 2025. This plan underpins the Council's key housing priorities for Stevenage, as set out under "More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Homes (MSAGQH)," one of the five strategic priorities in the "Making Stevenage Even Better 2024–2027 Corporate Plan".
- 3.3 The table below provides a summary of the overall commitments set out in the latest comprehensive review of the HRA Business Plan in 2026/27 to 2056/57.

 <b>Borrowing and RCCO</b>	 <b>Housing Development</b>	 <b>Housing Asset Management</b>	 <b>Housing Service Delivery</b>
<b>New Borrowing for Capital Investment £171m (30Yrs)</b>  <b>Refinanced debt to enable revenue operations £175m (30Yrs)</b>  <b>Revenue contribution to capital £2.2m in (years 1-5)</b>  <b>RTB changes mean lower investment need and repayment of Debt within 30yrs</b>	<b>Invest £457m in new stock (30Yrs)</b>  <b>Deliver 1,470 units (30Yrs) 320 in next 5yrs</b>  <b>Deliver new homes to 5 star promise</b>  <b>Secure grant funding for schemes where possible - £25m included in the plan</b>	<b>£744m stock investment funding (30Yrs) £148m in next 5 yrs</b>  <b>£699m repairs, void, and cyclical maintenance (30Yrs).</b>  <b>Efficiency target of £699K (5%) for 27/28</b>  <b>All properties to EPC-C by 2030</b>	<b>£775m in non-maintenance revenue funding (30yrs)</b>  <b>Savings</b> <b>£566k 26/27 then £1m 27/28</b> <b>£1m 28/29</b> <b>£500K 29/30</b> <b>£400K until 36/37</b> <b>Total cumulative saving of £3.5m by year 5.</b>  <b>Growth of £700k pa to enable service improvement / efficiency</b>



- 3.4 Members received an update on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan at the November 2025 Cabinet, including the medium-term position for 2026/27 to 2030/31. This update reflected major changes since the previous year's plan, including new national regulatory requirements, rent policy reforms, and the updated stock condition survey data. These changes have resulted in increased investment needs and higher borrowing in the early years of the plan, alongside challenging savings targets to maintain long-term viability.
- 3.5 The HRA Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2026/27–2030/31 reflects a front-loaded capital investment approach supported by tight revenue controls and significant borrowing. On revenue, the plan assumed:

 <b>Rent</b>	 <b>Growth and Savings</b>	 <b>Capital</b>	 <b>Financing</b>
<p><b>Consumer Prices Index (CPI) + 1% rent increases</b></p> <p><b>Rent convergence to national formula from 2026/27 capped at £1 per week</b></p> <p><b>Use rent flexibility on relet of homes – 5% for social rent and 10% for supported</b></p>	<p><b>£700k annual growth for compliance and service improvements</b></p> <p><b>Savings programme of £566k in 2026/27, rising to £1m annually.</b></p> <p><b>A one off 5% repairs saving from 2027/28, is required</b></p> <p><b>£5.8m ongoing savings by year 10</b></p>	<p><b>£148Million capital over five years for</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>major works/ compliance upgrades (incl. meeting EPC-C energy standard by 2030)</li> <li>£95m for new development, delivering around 320 homes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Debt servicing peaks at 32% of income</b></p> <p><b>Financing based on</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>£171m new borrowing and £175m refinancing over the life of the plan</li> </ul> <p><b>Supplemented by</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Homes England grants (£25m)</li> <li>RTB receipts</li> <li>limited revenue contributions</li> </ul> <p><b>Peak debt of £354m in year six, but repay debt by the end of the 30-year plan</b></p>



### Housing Regulatory Network

- 3.6 The main regulatory framework for social housing is shaped by three key bodies: the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), the Housing Ombudsman, and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The RSH sets economic and consumer standards, ensuring providers maintain financial viability, governance, and tenant engagement. The Council was inspected by the RSH in November 2024 and received a C2 consumer grading, indicating that while the Council meets many requirements of the Consumer Standards, improvements are needed in areas such as tenant engagement and transparency. The inspection confirmed strong compliance with health and safety obligations and effective repairs services, but highlighted gaps in reporting remedial actions and involving tenants in service scrutiny. The Council has committed to an improvement plan with the Regulator to address these issues and aims to achieve a C1 rating at the next inspection in four years. The Housing Ombudsman oversees complaints handling and promotes fair resolution processes, reinforcing accountability and transparency. Finally, the HSE focuses on compliance with health and safety legislation, safeguarding tenants and workers through robust building and maintenance standards (much of the HSE's role is due to transition to the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) from January 2026). Together, these bodies provide a comprehensive framework that underpins quality, safety, and financial resilience across the sector.
- 3.7 The Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules in the Constitution prescribe the budget-setting process, including a minimum consultation period of three weeks. Under Article 4 of the Constitution, the Budget encompasses the allocation of financial resources to services and projects, proposed contingency funds, rent setting for the Housing Revenue Account, decisions on borrowing requirements, control of capital expenditure, and the setting of virement limits. In line with the HRA Business Plan and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, the Council ensures that these decisions reflect statutory obligations, long-term investment priorities, and enhanced tenant engagement during consultation.
- 3.8 The timeline for 2026/27 HRA Budget setting is as below:



## **4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS**

### **4.1. Rents**

- 4.1.1. The total number of HRA homes in management as at 31 October 2025 is summarised in the table below. The average rents for 2026/27 are based on the



current housing stock and any right to buy sales, or new schemes coming on stream after this date, may change the average rent per property type.

Stock Numbers at 31/10/2025	Social	Affordable	Sheltered	Shelt. Afford	LSSO	Homeless	Total
Number of Properties	6,703	65	836	32	79	192	7,907

- 4.1.2. For 2026/27 rent has been set in accordance with the current Rent Standard of September CPI plus 1 %. The September CPI was 3.8% meaning rents will increase by 4.8%.
- 4.1.3. In the summer of 2025, the Government consulted on their intention to restart a rent convergence policy that was initially introduced in 2002 but abandoned by the last Government in 2015. This policy involves moving all social rents in a locality (regardless of the provider) to a standard formula based rent that is calculated on average local earnings and property prices. Based on the consultation it was expected that the government would announce its decision on a £1 or £2 increase, as this had been a key request from the housing sector, alongside uprating the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate and temporary accommodation subsidy. However, the Government have delayed the announcement on rent convergence until January 2026.
- 4.1.4. As the Government has not confirmed whether they will include rent convergence in the final rent standard for April 2026, the final budget proposal excludes the impact of this, but recommends that, if the Government announces a rent convergence policy before the full Council meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, Members approve this to support the financial resilience of the HRA, as set out in the December Draft Budget report. If approved the papers and recommendations will be adjusted to reflect the final rent standard, with a £1 limit on rent convergence this would increase annual rent income for 2026/27 by £209K.
- 4.1.5. The tables below show the impact with and without rent convergence. The proposed average rents per week for 2026/27 are set out below, based on a 52-week year and the current housing stock in management.

#### **2026/27 Rent Increase without rent convergence**

Average Rents 2026/27	LSSO	Increase/ (decrease) %	Social	Increase/ (decrease) %	Affordable	Increase/ (decrease) %
Average Rent 2025/26	£151.17		£122.83		£184.36	
Add rent impact 2026/27	£7.26	4.8%	£5.89	4.8%	£8.85	4.8%
<b>Total 52 wk Rent 2026/27</b>	<b>£158.43</b>		<b>£128.72</b>		<b>£193.21</b>	

- 4.1.6. Applying CPI plus 1% to current rent levels would lead to an average rise of £7.26 per week for shared ownership (LSSO) properties, £5.89 per week for social rent properties and £8.85 per week for affordable rent (at 80% of market rents). The table below shows the additional impact of applying rent convergence with a £1 per week limit. This adds an additional 93p per week to shared ownership rent and 83p to social

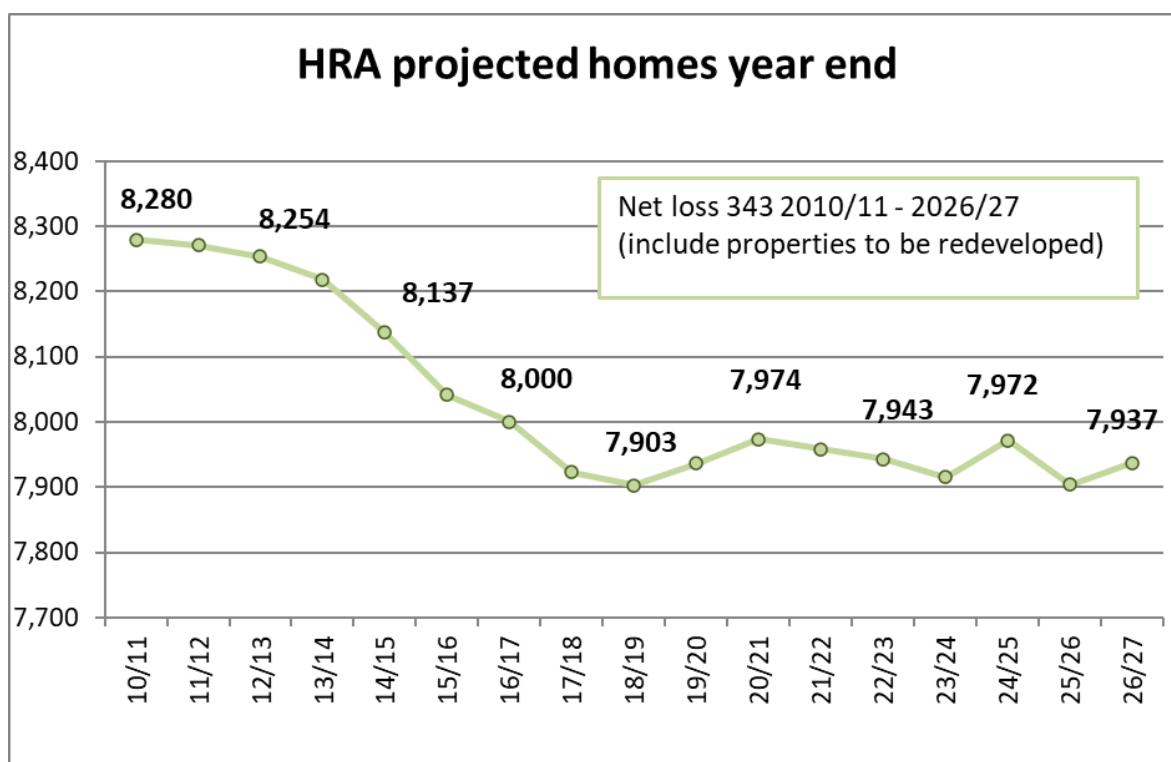


rents. There is no change to affordable rents, as these are not included within the rent formula standard.

### **2026/27 Rent Increase with rent convergence**

Average Rents with Convergence 2026/27	LSSO	Increase/ (decrease) %	Social	Increase/ (decrease) %	Affordable	Increase/ (decrease) %
Average Rent 2025/26	£151.17		£122.83		£184.36	
Add rent impact 2026/27	£8.19	5.4%	£6.72	5.5%	£8.85	4.8%
<b>Total 52 wk Rent 2026/27</b>	<b>£159.36</b>		<b>£129.55</b>		<b>£193.21</b>	

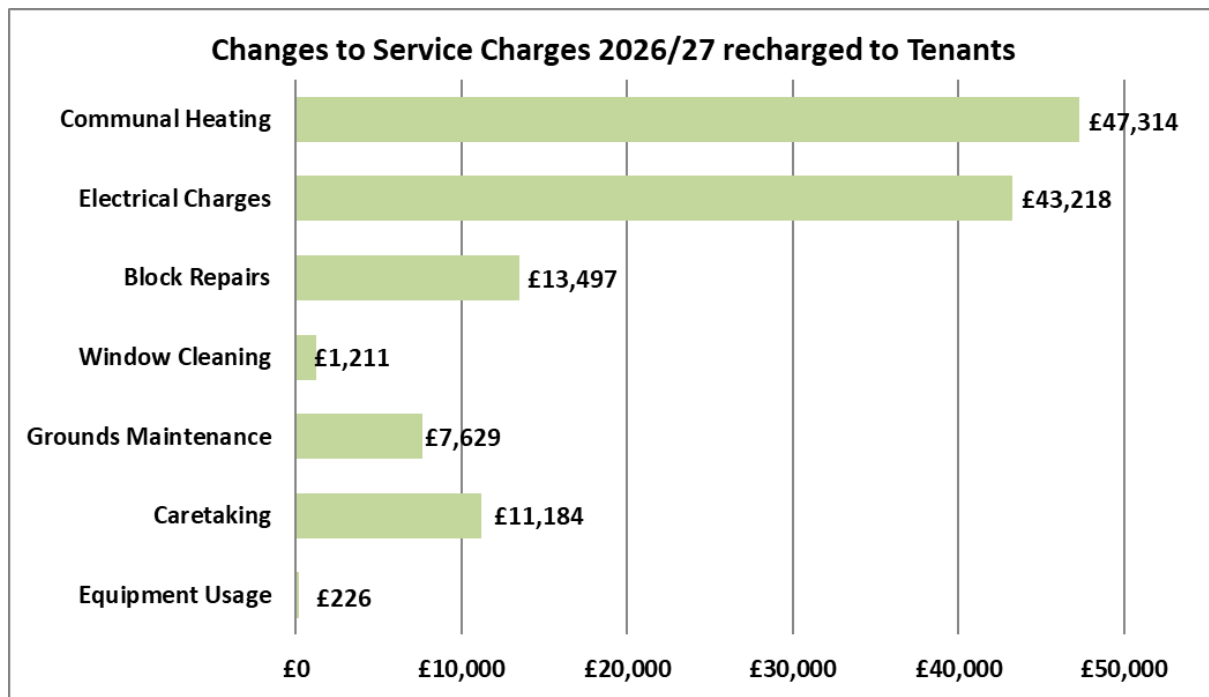
- 4.1.7. The 2026/27 net rental income increase is estimated to be £2.6Million (£2.8Million with rent convergence), which includes the estimated impacts of right to buy (RTB) sales, expected new properties, properties taken out of management (awaiting redevelopment) and without the impact of rent convergence with a £1 cap.
- 4.1.8. The total number of Council homes is projected to have reduced by 343 between 2010/11 and the end of 2026/27 (based on the net impact of RTBs, new homes and homes awaiting development).



## **4.2. Service Charges 2025/26**

- 4.2.1. Service charges are calculated on an individual block basis for 2,783 properties, (2025/26 2,757) or 35% of current SBC tenanted properties.



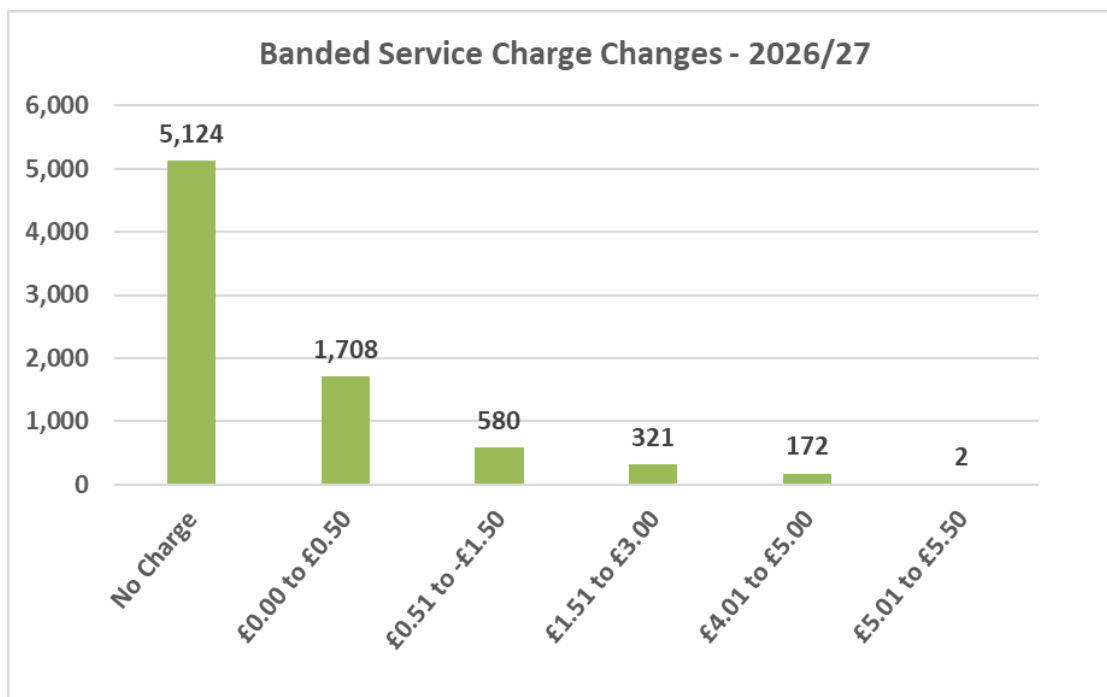


4.2.2. Service charges are not subject to a formula rent increase but are based on cost recovery or actual cost. For 2026/27 service charge costs will increase with inflationary pressures and changes in usage. The chart above identifies the changes between 2025/26 and 2026/27 for service charges and the estimates are based on the projected budgeted costs, except for block repairs, which are 'smoothed' over a five-year period to eliminate individual in-year spikes in repairs spend.

4.2.3. The chart in paragraph 4.2.4 illustrates that energy prices are still expected to cause the largest increase year to year. However, they are still lower than the exceptional spike in prices seen in 2022/23. Most changes are in line with the November Business Plan revision, but projected energy prices are slightly more than anticipated.

4.2.4. The spread of service charge changes for all tenants in 2026/27 is shown in the chart below, including utility charges and communal heating schemes that are not eligible for housing benefits. The graph shows that 5,124 (65%) of homes do not have service charges. Of the 2,783 properties that do 1,708, the majority (61%) will have increases of less than 50p per week. The remaining properties with higher increases, have been driven by utility price rises that are still projected to be higher than general inflation.

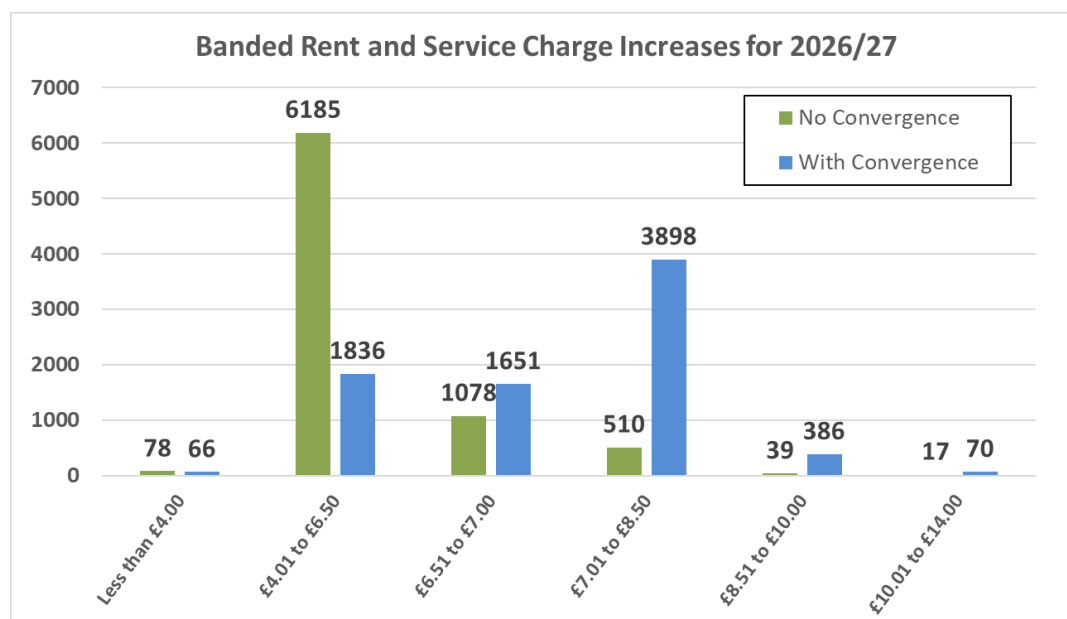




*note increase per week*

#### 4.3. Rents and Service Charges

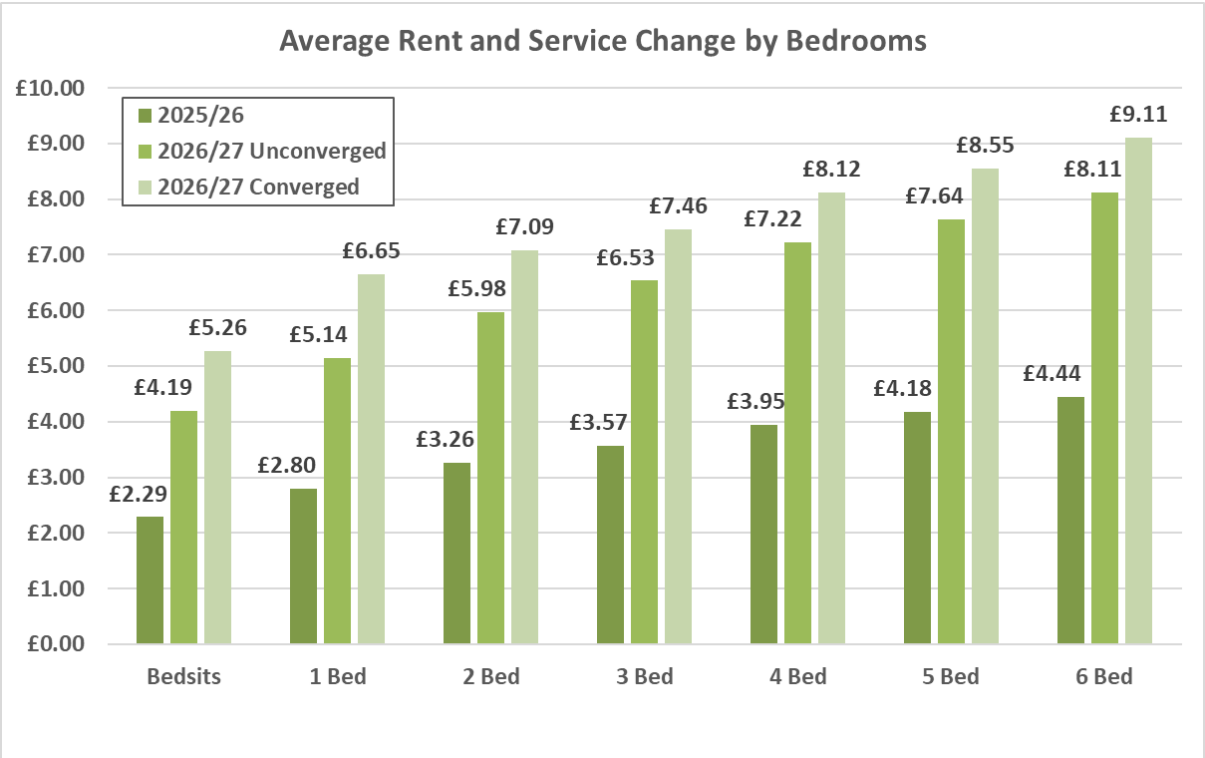
- 4.3.1. The graph below shows the combined impact of the 2026/27 rent and service charge increases, both with and without rent convergence. Without rent convergence the majority of properties (7,341 93%) have a weekly increase of £7 or less. With rent convergence, capped to £1 per week, the majority of properties (7,451 94%) have a weekly increase of £8.50 or less. With rent convergence included there are 70 properties with an increase between £10 and £14 per week (or 0.9% of the stock). Of these, 53 include charges for communal heating and 17 are affordable rent properties, with a higher weekly rent. The full distribution of the 2026/27 rent and service charge changes are summarised in the chart below.



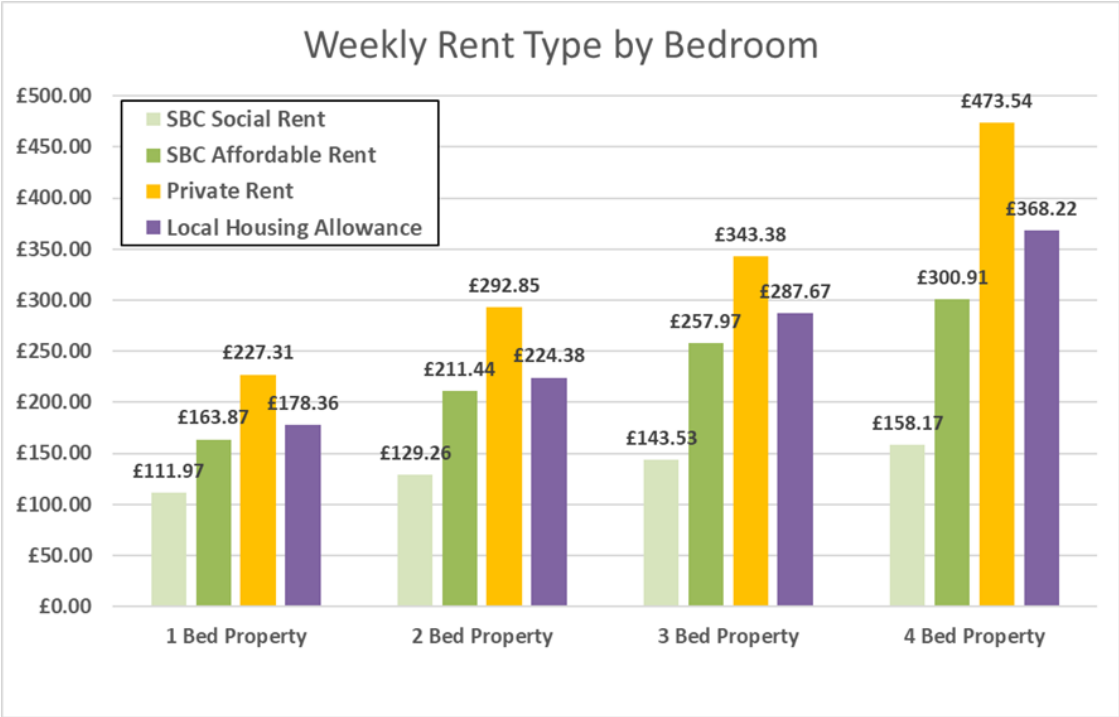
*note increase per week*



4.3.2. The average rent and service charge increase by bedroom size has also been calculated and summarised in the chart below.



4.3.3. The chart above shows the increase with and without rent convergence with a £1 cap per week. For note the rent increase based on CPI September 2024 was 1.7% versus 3.8% for September 2025.





4.3.4. The comparison above between HRA property rents per week (with rent convergence and a £1 cap) and private sector rents per week, for one to four-bedroom properties, is shown in the Graph above. The latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) data, to October 2025, shows that private sector rents in Stevenage have increased substantially from last year. One bedroom properties have risen by 6% and four bedroom homes have risen by over 4%.

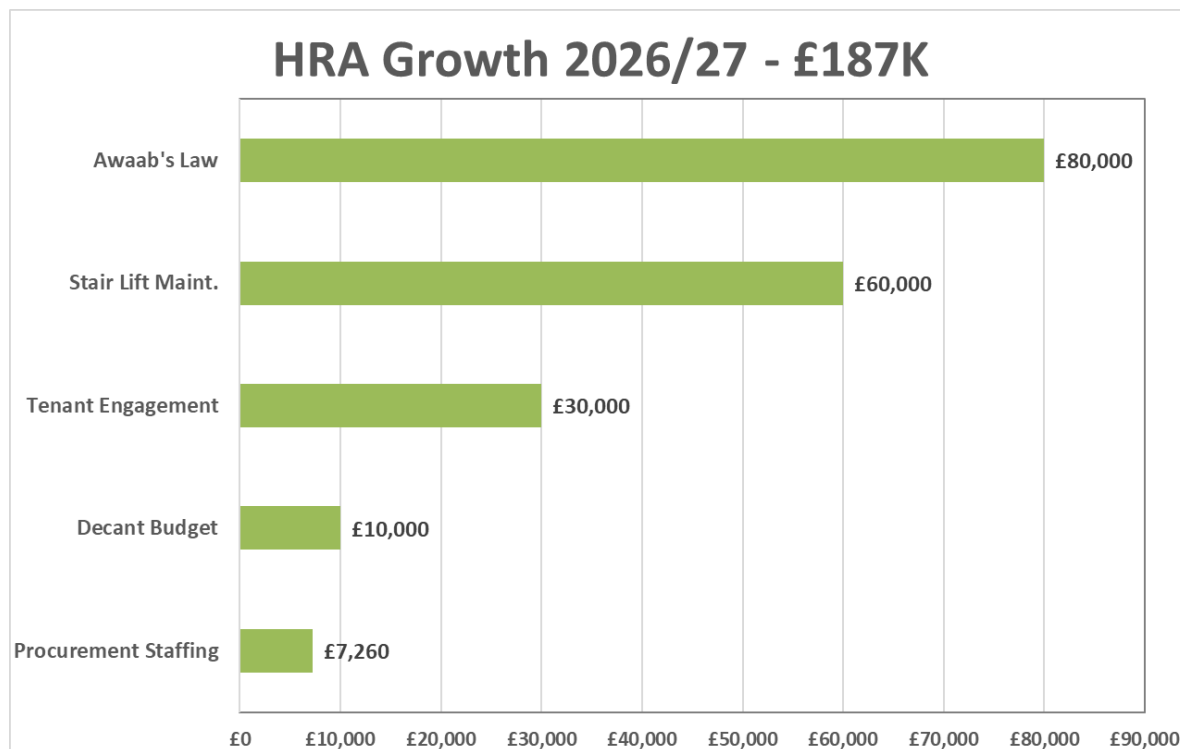
Rent Convergence - £1 Cap	SBC Social Rent	SBC Affordable Rent	Private Rent	Local Housing Allowance	Private v SBC Social %	Private v SBC Affordable %
1 Bed Property	£111.97	£163.87	£227.31	£178.36	103%	39%
2 Bed Property	£129.26	£211.44	£292.85	£224.38	127%	39%
3 Bed Property	£143.53	£257.97	£343.38	£287.67	139%	33%
4 Bed Property	£158.17	£300.91	£473.54	£368.22	199%	57%

*Private rent Data from ONS as at October 2025 and the Local Housing Allowance is based on current rates. Please note the SBC rents are April 2026 prices and the private rents October 2025 prices.*

4.3.5. A three-bedroom private sector rental property costs an additional 139%, (2024/25, 142%) more per week than a Stevenage Borough Council home and 33% more than the affordable let properties, (2024/25 34%). The Local Housing Allowance (LHA), shown in the table above, is the maximum amount of housing benefit payable by property size for private rented properties.

#### 4.4. Growth included in the HRA

4.4.1. The following growth items have been included within the 2026/27 HRA budget, in addition to the current working budget.

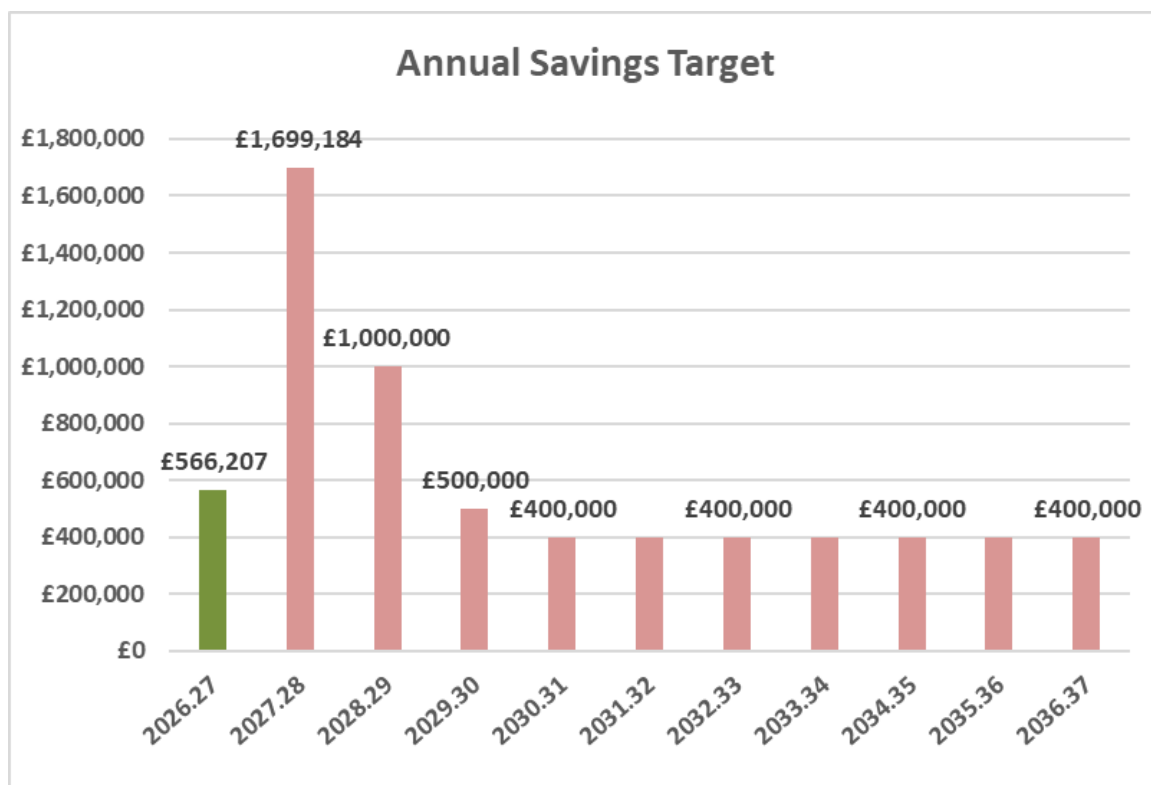


4.4.2. **Awaab's Law Implementation £80K** – An additional business support role has been funded from within existing budgets in 2025/26. However, with the implementation of Awaab's Law from October 2025 and expanded to the other "Housing Health and



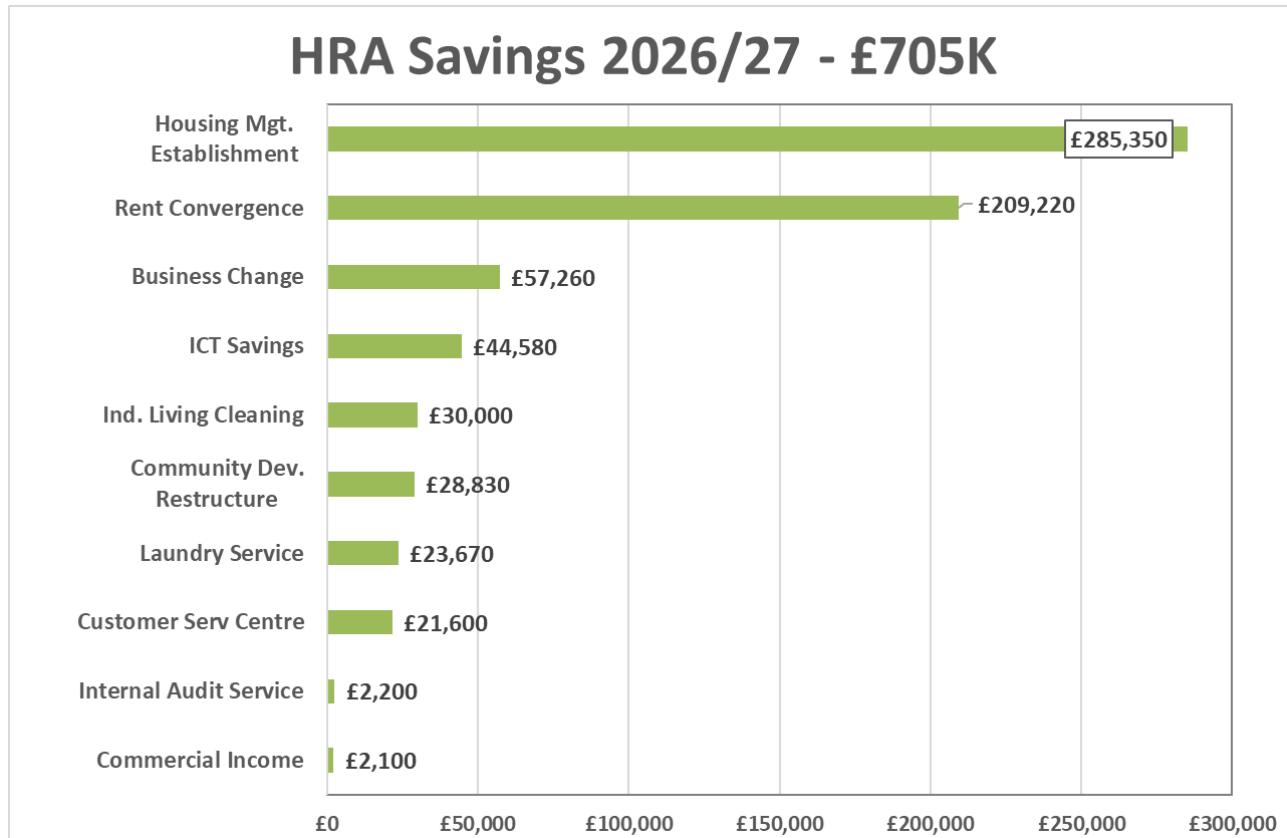
Safety Rating System” (HHSRS) potential hazards over the next two years, it is likely that staffing resources will need to increase to ensure legal and regulatory compliance.

- 4.4.3. **Stair Lift Maintenance Contract £60K** – The contract value is expected to be higher, as the number of stairlifts and other lifting equipment, installed in Council properties, has increased. This is in response to the level of demand for aids and adaptations to homes. It is projected that the increased level of servicing will offset any potential cost efficiencies that may be achieved through a competitive tender process.
- 4.4.4. **Tenant Engagement £30K** - This growth is for the facilitation of tenant engagement activities, linked to the “Provider Improvement Plan”, so that the Council can demonstrate enhanced regulatory compliance with the “Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard” and meet the commitments within the Resident Engagement Strategy 2024-2027.
- 4.4.5. **Decant Budget £10K** - There is a rise in the necessity to decant tenants from their properties, due to historic disrepair cases and on occasion, due to property neglect. This is likely to be further impacted by Awaab's Law.
- 4.4.6. **Procurement Staffing £7K** – This function has three staff that support a shared service across East Herts, Hertsmere, and Stevenage Councils. The additional staff requirement is supported by the Senior Leadership Team and will ensure that new regulations, as a result of the new Procurement Act 2023, are delivered effectively. The remainder of the post’s costs have been funded from changes in the finance team.
- 4.5. **Savings Options**
- 4.5.1. The latest 30 year HRA business plan has identified the need for substantial revenue savings in the medium term forecast, see paragraph 3.3 and graph below.





- 4.5.2. A preliminary savings review was conducted in the summer which initially identified £566K potential savings for 2026/27, however further analysis of actual savings to be achieved in 2026/27 is now showing £496K, with the addition of £209K from rent convergence with a £1 cap (to be confirmed by the Government). The individual savings included in the proposed budget are detailed below.



- 4.5.3. **Housing Management Establishment £285K** – The budget saving exercise in the summer identified a potential £346K saving from a rationalisation of the current staffing establishment, in particular an analysis off long-term vacant posts. After the detailed analysis was completed an actual saving of £285K has been included in the budget. There is no negative impact on services from this measure, as the savings derive from long term vacant posts where service efficiencies mean that they are no longer needed. Also, there are some vacated “fixed term” posts that have remained in the establishment, or where new posts have been created for a job share and the original post is still budgeted.
- 4.5.4. **Rent Convergence £209K** - The business plan also included an estimated £209K additional income stream from the reintroduction of rent convergence that the Government has recently consulted on and is detailed at 4.1. This estimate was included in the Draft HRA Budget, but as there has not been confirmation of this rent policy change, it has been removed in section 4.6.4 below. If the Government announces the rent policy before the Council meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January this will be reinstated.
- 4.5.5. **Business Change Team £57K** – a review of the Business Change Team budgets has identified savings for 2026/27 and the HRA’s share of these central costs has reduced by £57K as a result.



- 4.5.6. **ICT Savings £45K** – there are two areas included in this saving. A saving of £33K has been identified, as a result of a software review and more extensive use of the Microsoft 365 product. The second item of £12K relates to the HRA's share of the removal of a vacant post in the current ICT staff structure.
- 4.5.7. **Independent Living Cleaning £30K** – A review has been carried out to reduce duplication between caretaking services and the Independent Living cleaning service and this is projected to reduce costs by £30K per annum.
- 4.5.8. **Community Development Restructure £29K** - Savings were identified for the HRA following the restructure of the Community Development and Co-operative Neighbourhoods Team, which was approved and actioned in June 2025.
- 4.5.9. **Laundry Service £24K** - The closure of laundry facilities was proposed due to a low level of usage and the costs of maintaining the equipment. Consultation was carried out with affected residents in the 2 blocks impacted before the decision was made to close these facilities. Those residents who raised concerns about the closure will be supported. For example, plumbing will be provided where tenants wish to install a washing machine in their flat and referrals will be made to the Welfare team for help, advice, and support.
- 4.5.10. **Customer Services Centre £22K** – A management saving is proposed within the Customer Service Centre through the deletion of one management role. No redundancies are expected, as temporary arrangements are currently in place.
- 4.5.11. **Other savings £4K** – there are two other small savings, totalling £4K, identified for additional commercial income from advertising and changes to the internal audit costs.
- 4.5.12. In addition to the savings identified above and since the business plan report was published, the results of the latest pension scheme review have been received, and the annual employer contribution reduces for the period 2026/27-2028/29 reducing pay costs by an estimated £876K ( as set out in the December Draft HRA budget report) which may help meet future savings gaps. The pension scheme actuaries carry out a major review every three years to determine the necessary contribution rate of the Council and to identify any historic underfunding that needs to be met. Originally it was anticipated that the current employer's contribution of 19.3% (2026/27 16.5%) would remain in place and additional historic costs would need to be funded. A growth item now not needed of £30K was included in the business plan to meet this contingency.
- 4.6. **Changes to the December 2025 Draft HRA Budget**
- 4.6.1. The Draft Budget report indicated that there were two areas that may contain further budget pressures that were not finalised in time for the December meeting. These were the final overhead recharges between the General Fund and the HRA and emerging increased costs relating to building safety budgets. Other changes that have also been included in the final budget proposal are increased income from interest on balances and the removal of rent convergence from the budget, until this is confirmed by the Government. All the changes between the draft and final budget are detailed below.
- 4.6.2. **Building Safety Growth - £513K increase.** The growth has been driven from the reviews of current practice and to comply with the latest regulations. The areas that have increased costs are:



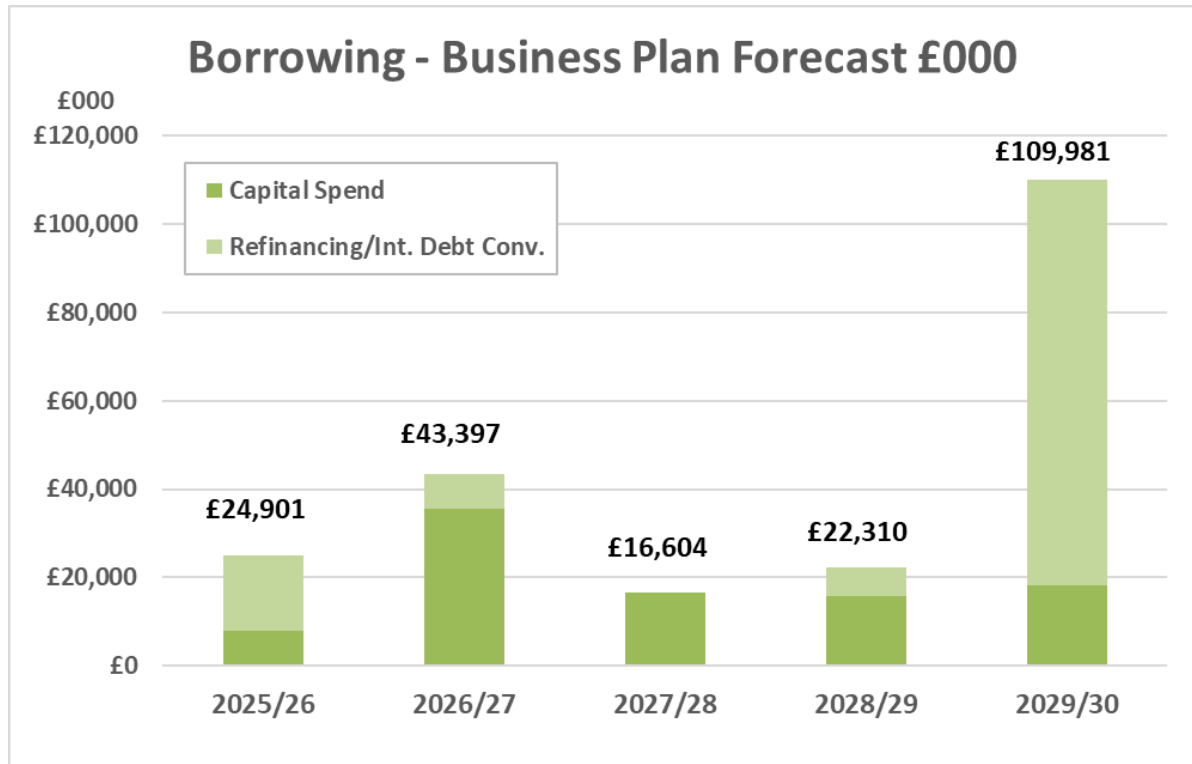
- door inspections £178K
- solar panel inspections £83K
- water system inspections £55K
- maintenance for new developments £33K
- lift maintenance £56K
- fire remedial work £235K

This has been partially offset by allocating other budgets but leaves a net growth of £513K. Some of these items are not annual, for example on solar panel inspections, so future years will not always need this full allocation.

- 4.6.3. **Net Increase in Recharges - £300K increase.** The draft budget did not include any inflationary increase on recharges from the General Fund, because the reduction in pension costs was expected to offset most of this. However, when recharges were calculated on the latest allocation basis there has been an increase of £436K on the 2025/26 budget of £8.85Million. However, this has been slightly offset by a review of recharges from the HRA to the General fund, increasing by £136K, giving a net increase of £300K of costs to the HRA budget.
- 4.6.4. **Removal of Rent Convergence - £209K increase.** As set out in paragraph 4.1.4 the Government has not finalised the rent standard for 2026/27, and the impact of a £1 cap increase has been removed from the final budget proposal. If a final decision is made by the Government before full Council in January, the budget proposal will be amended (subject to approval) to reflect this.
- 4.6.5. **Interest on Balances - £633K increase.** As a result of the one off increase in RTB receipts, the conversion of internal borrowing to external debt and the relative reserve positions of the General Fund and the HRA, there has been a significant increase in the expected investment income due for 2026/27. This level of investment income will reduce as HRA receipts are used to support the capital programme.
- 4.6.6. **Other changes - £27K increase.** There were other smaller adjustments to the budget with a net impact of a £27K increase that have been made to the final budget and are listed in the table in paragraph 4.10.1.
- 4.7. **Borrowing**
- 4.7.1. Based on current forecasts, new loans totalling £24.9Million and £43.4Million are projected to be taken in 2025/26 and 2026/27, respectively. However, recent volatility in Government debt interest rates may change the timing of when to take the new borrowing. This will be reviewed, weighing up the cost of carry and the prevailing Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) rates. The interest payable in 2025/26 and 2026/27 is estimated to be £9Million and £9.7Million respectively based on an average interest rate of 4.8%. It is not clear whether the Government will continue with the additional 0.6% discount on loans taken on HRA borrowing beyond 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026.
- 4.7.2. Current interest rates on Government debt remain higher than the much lower levels seen in the past decade and this has led to a revised debt strategy in the HRA Business Plan. As shown in the graph below there is a high level of projected borrowing in 2029/30, with £92Million of refinancing of current loans. This will allow the Council to borrow short term at 4.39% compared to the 30 year maturity rate of 5.59% (PWLB rates at 01/12/25) and refinance when lower interest rates are



anticipated. For the next two years the current model assumes an average rate of 4.8%, with the HRA Business plan estimating a longer-term average of 3.75%.



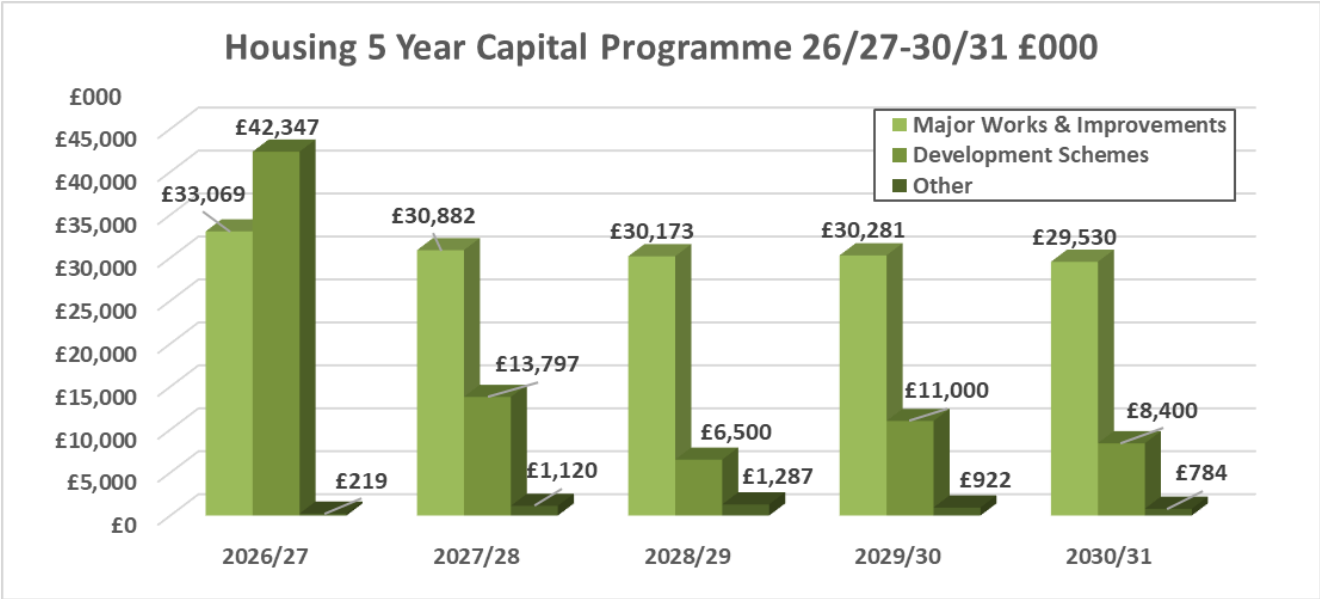
4.7.3. The graph above also shows the annual borrowing projected in the medium term and the split between loans funding capital expenditure and loans taken to convert internal borrowing, or to re-finance existing loans when they become due. Internal debt is generated when the Council uses balances to underwrite capital expenditure, usually for a temporary period. The debt to be taken for 2025/26 and 2026/27 is £68.3Million, of which £24.8Million is for converting internal borrowing to external debt. However, the exact timing of this borrowing could change, based upon the amount of balances held by the Council and changes to interest rates. The current HRA debt model assumes that short term borrowing will be converted to longer term debt in 2029/30, but this is more likely to be spread over a number of years to avoid the risk of needing to refinance if interest rates are high. Therefore, this profile will be reviewed in future years.

#### 4.8. Capital Expenditure

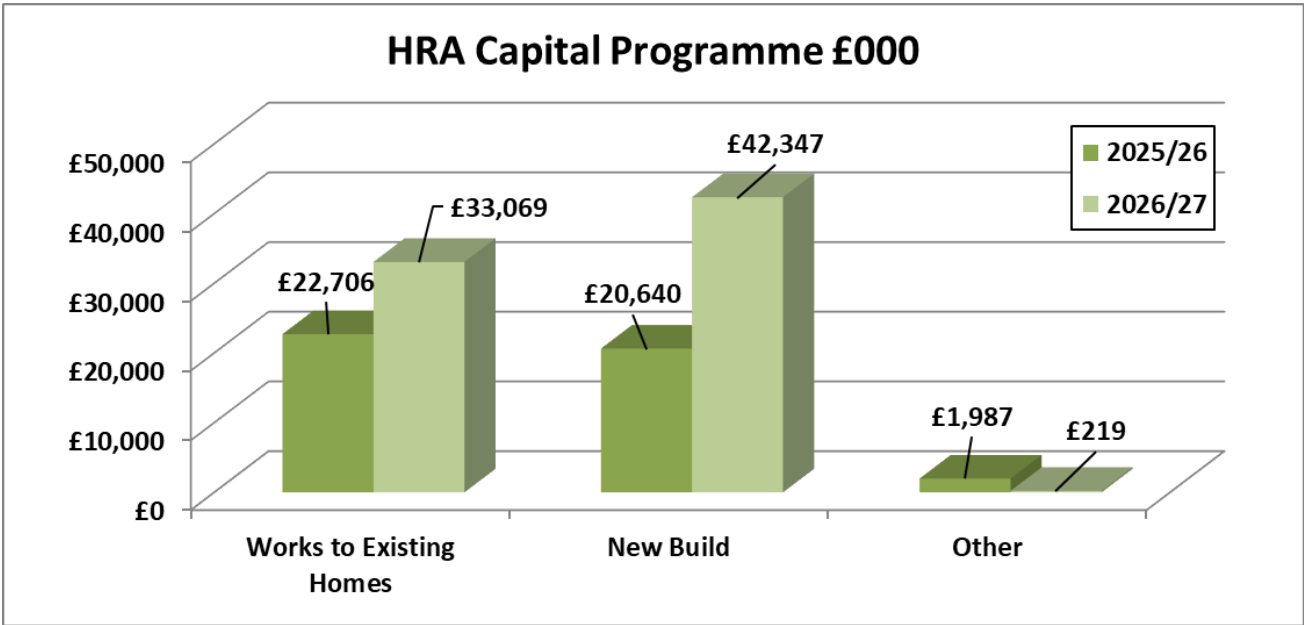
4.8.1. The graph below shows the high level summary of projected capital expenditure, included in the HRA Business Plan, for the next five years. Major works expenditure is expected to stay fairly consistent, starting at £33Million and dropping to £29.5Million by year five. This is higher than the major repairs allowance (funded by depreciation) and will require additional financing from grants, loans, and revenue contributions to capital. Development expenditure is linked to the timing of planned schemes and does vary from year to year. The high level of spend in 2026/27 of £42Million is due to two schemes at the Oval and Brent Court, but the timing of this expenditure may need to be adjusted, in line with operational requirements. Overall, there is a



projected £240Million capital programme over the next five years and the detailed programme is included at Appendix E.



4.8.2. The graph below compares the revised capital programme for 2025/26 and the proposed spend for 2026/27. Work to existing homes is set increase in line with the additional investment needs identified in recent stock condition surveys, from £23Million to £33Million. New development spend is also set to increase from £21Million to £42Million, due to the timing of the current schemes, as detailed in 4.7.3.

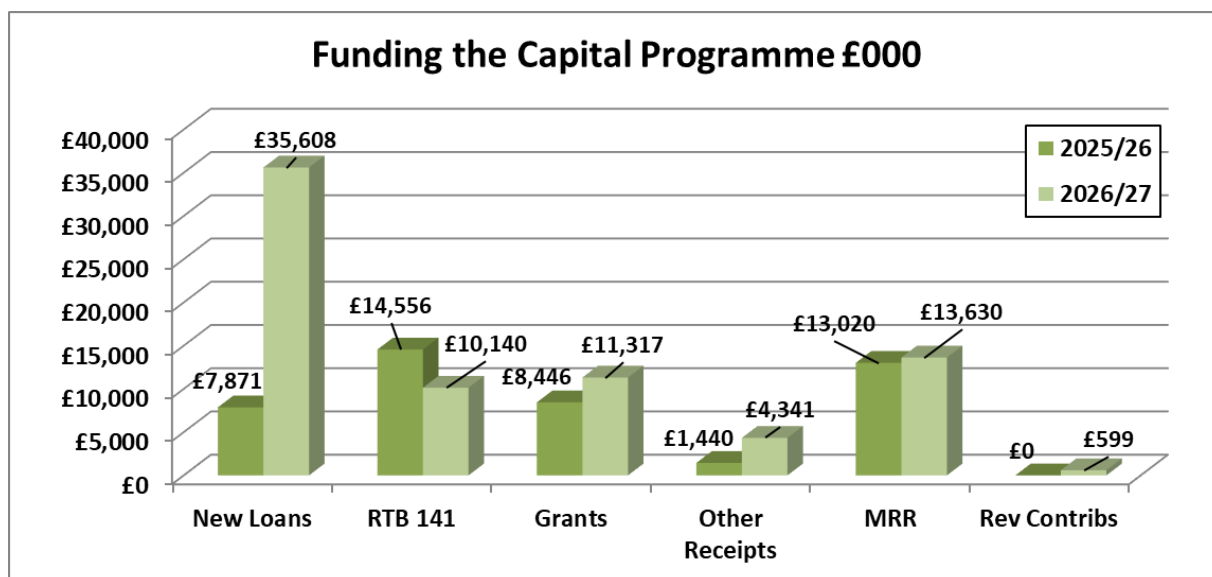


4.8.3. An opportunity has also arisen in the 2025/26 programme that will enable the Council to secure 5 more new homes as part of the Shephall View Scheme. This would require an additional budget of £1.5Million, but this would be funded by grants secured from Homes England of £1.170Million and a virement from the Oval scheme budget of £330K. This would make the addition of these properties cost neutral to the



current capital budget and a recommendation has been included in this report to enable negotiations to be completed within the final quarter of the current financial year.

- 4.8.4. The table below shows the funding sources for the programme. Due to the increased investment required in the existing housing stock (compared to the previous HRA BP), borrowing will be required to supplement the funding from the Major Repairs Reserve (MRR) that comes from depreciation charges to the HRA. New development will continue to be funded from RTB sale receipts and borrowing supplemented by significant Government grant support from Homes England secured to support qualifying developments.



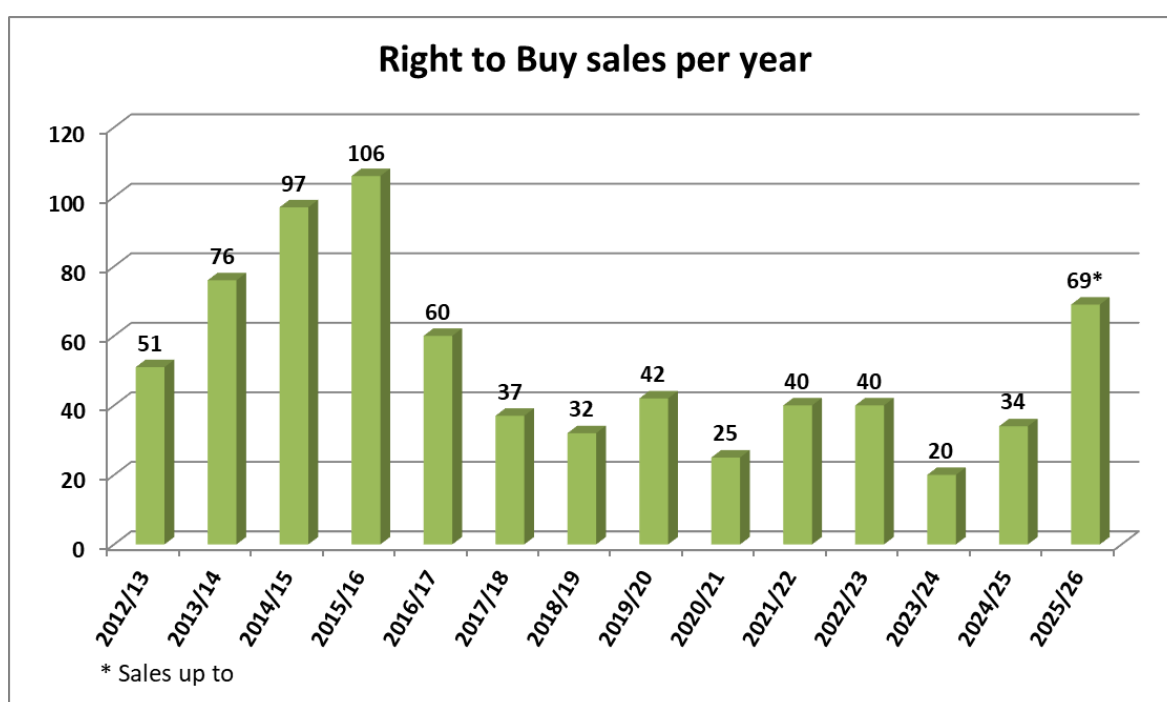
#### 4.9. Use of RTB One for One Receipts

- 4.9.1. Over the last year there have been significant changes in the RTB system, including the rules the Council have to follow in spending retained sales receipts on new properties. In the summer, the Government confirmed that many of the changes are now in place indefinitely and outlined further changes to the system that they intend to legislate for in the near future. In summary they confirmed that:

- Extension of the changes made in July 2024.
- Cap on purchase of existing properties permanently removed.
- 5 years to spend receipts confirmed (10 years from 2027/28).
- Treasury and local authority pre HRA self-financing deductions from receipts permanently removed from 2026/27.
- RTB receipts can be used with grant funding from 2026/27
- Further changes to discount calculations and qualification times to be legislated when parliamentary time allows.



- 4.9.2. The change in discounts from a maximum of £104K to £34K in November 2024 led to a large increase in applications before the deadline. Due to the time required to complete these sales, most of these additional applications are due to complete in 2025/26. The chart below shows a significant increase of 69 sales to October, and this is projected to be over 100 by the year end. It is also anticipated that there will be a further 20 sales in 2026/27, but after this the lower discount and further changes to the scheme are likely to reduce future disposals, (estimated to be 8 RTB's per annum from 2027/28). This has given the HRA a larger capital receipt than normal to be spent on replacement properties, under the RTB receipts retention scheme, of an estimated £21Million. However, the latest business plan anticipates that this is a one-off event and future receipts will be much lower.



- 4.9.3. This bigger than normal RTB receipt will give the Council more flexibility in its replacement programme over the next five years (albeit reduce the housing stock) and the opportunity to combine this with grant funding will enable further development and acquisitions to replace the lost housing stock. The latest business plan projects a further 320 new units will to be added over the next five years and that the Council.

#### 4.10. **Final Budget Proposals**

- 4.10.1. The Final 2026/27 HRA budget is estimated to be a net surplus of £141,620 a reduction of £417K from the Draft Budget reported to members in December. The table below shows the main movements in the budget, and these are detailed in section 4.6 above.



<b>Summary of 2026/27</b>		
<b>Draft HRA 2026/27 budget</b>		<b>(£558,520)</b>
<b>Changes from Draft to Final Budget</b>		
Building Safety growth	£513,070	
Inflation correction	£7,960	
Net change to Insurance after recharges to customers	(£16,030)	
Increase in final Apprenticeship Levy estimate	£14,990	
Increase in final General Fund recharges to the HRA	£436,390	
Increase in final HRA recharges to the General Fund	(£136,060)	
Net increase in final Electricity estimates	£20,300	
Removal of Rent Convergence	£209,220	
Increase in HRA interest on balances	(£633,220)	
<b>Total Changes:</b>		<b>£416,620</b>
<b>Final HRA 2026/27 budget</b>		<b>(£141,900)</b>

4.10.2. A risk assessment of balances has been completed and is in Appendix C to this report. Current minimum balances have increased from last year (£6.3Million to £10Million) to reflect the change in operational risks identified in the latest business plan projections. The need to invest more in the housing stock in the early part of the plan, large savings targets in the medium term and higher borrowing levels, with uncertainty on future interest rates, has meant that it is prudent to hold higher reserves to mitigate against variations in these costs. The HRA balances are expected to exceed the minimum requirement in the 2026/27 budget and these additional funds are held against any potential unknown future service pressures.

<b>HRA Balances:</b>	<b>2025/26 £</b>	<b>2026/27 £</b>
<b>HRA Balance 1 April</b>	(10,925,848)	(10,337,958)
Use of balances in Year	587,890	(141,900)
<b>HRA Balance 31 March</b>	<b>(10,337,958)</b>	<b>(10,479,858)</b>
Minimum Balances	(10,000,000)	(10,000,000)
Potential service pressures	(337,958)	(479,858)

#### 4.11. Consultation

4.11.1. The proposals in this paper have been developed following extensive consultation with Cabinet Members, the Executive Housing Working Group on 26 November 2025 (where they were noted), Senior Executives, and service managers across the Council. They also incorporate customer priorities identified through the recent Tenant Survey.



- 4.11.2 Overview and Scrutiny Committee 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. 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.
- 4.11.3 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.
- 4.11.4. At the June 2025 Spending Review, the UK Government announced a 10-year rent settlement allowing social housing providers to increase rents annually by September CPI + 1% from April 2026. This was an extension of the previous five-year proposal and was introduced to give housing providers, lenders, and investors greater long-term certainty for planning and investment.
- 4.11.5. In addition, the Government has consulted on a rent convergence mechanism, which would permit additional uplifts of £1 or £2 per week for properties currently below formula rent to accelerate alignment with target levels. This policy aims to ensure fairness and consistency in rent structures while supporting landlords' financial sustainability. The Government has delayed response to the consultation until January 2026 and will need to be included in the 2026/27 budget and MTFS if approved.
- 4.11.6. For the Council, these proposals align with the assumptions in the HRA Business Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy, offering an opportunity to improve income streams while maintaining affordability for tenants.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Financial Implications**

- 5.2 Financial implications are detailed within the body of the report. The proposed HRA budget for 2026/27 is underpinned by the updated 30-year HRA Business Plan, which assumes CPI + 1% rent increases and the reintroduction of rent convergence. However, confirmation of rent convergence is not expected until January 2026, creating uncertainty around income projections. The final budget does not include this measure, but if the Government proceed with rent convergence this will generate an additional £210K in 2026/27, with a £1 per week limit, and an additional £3.7Million over the first five years.
- 5.3 The final budget needs to include additional costs as set out in section 4.6 that has reduced the surplus in the Draft Budget report and is now included in the report to the January Cabinet.



#### 5.4 **Legal Implications**

5.5 Legal implications are included in the body of the report.

#### 5.6 **Staffing Implications**

5.7 The unions will be consulted on any options in this report that could have an adverse impact on staffing resources. While the 2026/27 savings programme includes some staffing-related efficiencies, these will be achieved through a review of vacant posts and service redesign only, with no impact on any currently filled posts. Human Resources will co-ordinate the implementation of any staff-related savings arising from the budget process to ensure compliance and workforce stability.

#### 5.8 **Risk Implications**

##### **Financial Risks**

5.9 The HRA faces significant financial risks that could impact its long-term sustainability. Inflation remains a key driver of both income and expenditure and is difficult to predict, influencing rent levels and overall stability. Interest rate volatility and the ability to service increased borrowing forecast to peak at £354 million in 2031/32, pose material challenges, despite assumptions of a gradual reduction to 3.75% in the longer term. Rent policy uncertainty adds further complexity and while a CPI+1% increase has been agreed, the Government has yet to confirm whether rent convergence will be implemented from 2026/27 and beyond. Also, service charge recovery may fall short of expectations.

5.10 Regulatory changes, including evolving Consumer Standards and Building Safety requirements, could increase operating and compliance costs. The Council's commitment to achieving net zero by 2050 presents technical and funding challenges, as decarbonisation costs cannot be fully met from tenant rents under current assumptions. Increased Right to Buy sales, despite revised forecasts, risk reducing rental income and constraining development capacity. In addition, sustained demand for aids and adaptations, currently requiring an additional £600k per annum, and rising rent arrears leading to higher bad debt provisions, represent further pressures on financial resilience. Unexpected build cost inflation and potential supply chain disruptions could add further uncertainty to the delivery of capital programmes and planned works.

5.11 The latest revision of the HRA business plan included specific schemes relating to refurbishment and meeting regulatory requirements for the Council's high rise blocks. Since the business plan was completed and after the appointment of specialist consultancy, the costs of essential and other potential works have been reviewed, informed by both up-to-date surveys and other building safety related information. The outcome of this review suggests that costs are likely to be much higher than previously estimated to remediate the blocks and to ensure compliance with relevant building safety legislation and to meet our commitment as a signatory to the Government's plan to accelerate the remediation of social housing (this covers over 95% of 11m plus buildings, still requiring remediation to their external wall systems, and 75% of the total number of 11m plus social sector buildings in England). The performance of the high-rise buildings has also been assessed, as part of a separate asset review completed during 2025/26, in line with the current housing asset management strategy (approved in November 2023). The outcomes of this review have also been informed by the updated costs of the building safety and other planned works. The financial implications from these reviews are likely to be



significant and have implications for the HRA Business Plan. Therefore, a separate report will be brought to Cabinet to consider the options and associated recommendations that follow on from the completed modelling work that will be undertaken.

- 5.12 The latest revision of the 30 year HRA Business Plan also includes high revenue savings to balance the demands on the ring fenced account in the medium to long term. By year 10 of the model £5.8Million of total on-going savings will need to have been made from the revenue budget, or reduced capital expenditure and financing costs. This represents a significant fall in expenditure and not meeting this target represents a large financial risk to the account.

### **Operational and Compliance Risks**

- 5.13 Operational risks include the potential for investment needs to exceed planned expenditure due to evolving Decent Homes and Consumer Standards, as well as compliance with the Building Safety Act. While current requirements apply only to buildings over 18 metres, any change in scope could significantly increase costs. Failure to meet the Social Housing Regulation Act requirements could result in enforcement action or fines, adding further pressure to the HRA. These risks are compounded by the need to maintain compliance with new regulatory frameworks and achieve a C1 grading, which may require additional investment in resident engagement and service improvements. Furthermore, shortages of skilled labour and supply chain disruptions could affect the timely delivery of capital programmes and maintenance works, increasing costs and operational risk.

### **Strategic and Social Risks**

- 5.14 The Council's commitment to achieving net zero by 2050 presents technical and funding challenges, as decarbonisation costs cannot be fully met from tenant rents under current assumptions. Although funding has been secured for EPC C compliance by 2030, further resources will be required to meet long-term targets as detailed in 5.17 below. Increased Right to Buy sales, despite revised forecasts, could reduce rental income and constrain development capacity. Rising rent arrears and associated bad debt provisions, alongside sustained demand for aids and adaptations, represent further risks to financial resilience. These pressures could lead to increased savings targets and require reprioritisation of capital programmes. Additionally, demographic changes and the need for specialist housing, such as Independent Living Schemes, will require careful planning to ensure future demand is met within financial constraints.

### **Mitigation Strategy**

- 5.15 To address these risks, the business plan incorporates a minimum £10 million reserve to absorb cost pressures and maintain flexibility. Debt assumptions are regularly reviewed, and capital programmes are monitored to ensure affordability. Rent and service charge policies allow for formula-based adjustments and flexibility on relets, while procurement strategies include forward ordering and support for local SMEs to mitigate inflation and supply chain risks. The Council continues to enhance stock data, seek external funding for decarbonisation, and implement revised arrears management processes. Compliance with regulatory requirements is supported through gap analysis, improvement plans, and pro-active budget reviews, ensuring the HRA remains robust and adaptable to emerging challenges. Strategic flexibility is maintained through development mix adjustments, including scope to increase



affordable rent units where necessary, and by re-profiling capital budgets to meet demand-led pressures such as aids and adaptations.

### **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 5.16 In exercising or changing its functions, including service delivery and staffing, the Council must comply with the Equality Act 2010, specifically section 149, which sets out the Public Sector Equality Duty. This duty replaced previous legislation under the Race Relations Act (section 71), the Sex Discrimination Act (section 76A), and the Disability Discrimination Act (section 49A). The Council has a statutory obligation to demonstrate, as part of its decision-making process, that due regard has been given to the needs outlined in the Act. These duties are non-delegable and must be considered by Council when setting the budget in January 2026.
- 5.17 To inform decisions on the 2026/27 Budget, officers have undertaken initial Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) for HRA Rent Setting and Service Charges. These assessments will be further developed as proposals are agreed and implemented. Where a potential negative impact has been identified, officers have outlined additional actions required to inform final decisions and, where possible, mitigate adverse effects.
- 5.18 Attached as Appendix D is an EqIA for increasing the rent charged by 4.8% per annum and increased Service Charges including the mitigations that will be implemented to lessen the impact wherever possible.

### **Climate Change Implications**

- 5.19 The anticipated revised Decent Homes Standard and the targets set within the HRA Asset Management Strategy will continue to improve the environmental performance of the existing housing stock. The revised HRA Business Plan includes provision to achieve a minimum EPC rating of C by 2030, supported by the Warm Homes programme, which will retrofit 379 properties by March 2028. However, approximately 2,200 homes will still require investment to meet this standard. While the Council is committed to reducing the environmental impact of its housing stock, full decarbonisation to achieve net zero by 2050 is not included in the current plan due to the estimated additional cost of £110m–£128m, which is unaffordable without significant external funding. The Housing Asset Management Service will continue to review its approach and seek grant funding opportunities to support delivery of energy efficiency improvements, contributing to the Council's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.
- 5.20 Future housing developments will incorporate environmental performance considerations within design and specification, introducing technologies and materials that enhance energy efficiency and sustainability, subject to viability and funding availability.

## **6. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

BD1 Final Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Setting and Rent Report 2025/26 - January 2025 Council.

BD2 HRA Business Plan – November 2025 Cabinet.

BD3 Making Stevenage Even Better 2024–2027 Corporate Plan



**7. APPENDICES**

Appendix A – HRA Summary 2026/27

Appendix B - Fees and Charges 2026/27

Appendix C - Risk Assessment of Balances 2026/27

Appendix D – Rent EQIA 2026/27

Appendix E – HRA Capital Strategy 2026/27



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APPENDIX A	HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT SUMMARY			
	Actual 2023/24 £	Original Budget 2025/26 £	Working Budget 2025/26 £	Original Budget 2026/27 £
<b>Summary of Expenditure</b>				
Supervision and Management	10,922,941	13,317,360	12,777,470	12,627,830
Special Services	6,805,960	7,670,426	7,722,716	8,070,170
Rent, Rates, Taxes and Other Charges	826,362	870,784	894,784	933,920
Repairs and Maintenance <sup>(1)</sup>	18,285,688	15,094,930	16,153,120	16,152,160
Depreciation	13,381,745	13,138,170	13,138,170	13,512,390
Corporate and Democratic Costs	1,141,113	1,081,490	1,081,490	1,228,830
Contribution to the Bad Debt Provision	391,226	439,270	439,270	488,220
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>51,755,035</b>	<b>51,612,430</b>	<b>52,207,020</b>	<b>53,013,520</b>
<b>Summary of Income</b>				
<b>Rental Income:</b>				
Dwelling Rents	(48,942,003)	(50,984,660)	(50,798,060)	(53,123,070)
Non Dwelling Rents	(82,270)	(104,050)	(104,050)	(110,150)
	(49,024,273)	(51,088,710)	(50,902,110)	(53,233,220)
Charges for Services & Facilities - Tenants	(3,196,863)	(3,275,840)	(3,275,840)	(3,599,150)
Leaseholder Service Charges	(1,552,894)	(1,254,930)	(1,422,930)	(1,531,500)
Contributions Towards Expenditure	(371,588)	(365,880)	(433,480)	(387,370)
Reimbursement of Costs	(460,432)	(348,540)	(398,540)	(399,040)
Recharge Income (GF & Capital)	(2,450,925)	(2,813,320)	(2,588,020)	(2,961,660)
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>(57,056,976)</b>	<b>(59,147,220)</b>	<b>(59,020,920)</b>	<b>(62,111,940)</b>
Gain/(Loss) on disposal of HRA Non-Current Assets	(3,247,677)	0	0	0
Interest Payable	8,269,717	10,146,840	8,641,160	9,673,830
Interest Receivable	(1,024,664)	(1,444,070)	(739,370)	(1,316,090)
Capital grants & Contributions receivable	(9,898,062)	0	0	0
Capital Financed from Revenue Contributions	2,836,926	0	0	598,780
<b>Net (Surplus)/Deficit For Year</b>	<b>(8,365,702)</b>	<b>1,167,980</b>	<b>1,087,890</b>	<b>(141,900)</b>
<b>Movement on the HRA</b>				
Accounting basis to funding basis under statute	13,769,830	0	0	0
Transfer to/(from) Reserves	(5,745,371)	(500,000)	(500,000)	0
<b>Housing Revenue Account Balance</b>				
<b>Net Expenditure/(Income) for Year</b>	<b>(341,243)</b>	<b>667,980</b>	<b>587,890</b>	<b>(141,900)</b>
<b>Balance B/Fwd 1 April</b>	<b>(10,584,605)</b>	<b>(10,925,848)</b>	<b>(10,925,848)</b>	<b>(10,337,958)</b>
<b>HRA Balance C/Fwd 31 March</b>	<b>(10,925,848)</b>	<b>(10,257,868)</b>	<b>(10,337,958)</b>	<b>(10,479,858)</b>



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# HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT FEES AND CHARGE PROPOSED 2026/27

Appendix B

Service	Details	2025/26 Fee	2026/27 Propossed Fee	2026-27 Proposed Increase (£)	2026-27 Proposed Increase (%)	Working Budget 2025/26	Budget Increase (from fee proposals)
<b>Housing Revenue Account</b>							
<b>Specialist Support</b>							
Guest Bedrooms	Silkin Court, Walpole Court, Scarborough Avenue, Southend Close, Pinewoods & Fred Millard.	£14.90	£16.60	£1.70	11.38%		
Guest flats	Norman Court, Silkin Court	£25.40	£28.60	£3.20	12.58%		
Short Stay Units	Assessment (per day)	£12.90	£15.30	£2.40	18.60%		
	Respite*	£25.30	£28.10	£2.80	11.07%		
						5,704	570
Laundry Charges	Independent living/flexicare laundry wash	£3.60	£3.70	£0.10	2.78%		
						22,144	-1,534
Room Hire	Hairdressing at Silkin/Fred Millard, (Hourly charge) *	£6.60	£6.80	£0.20	3.03%		
	Private chiropodist and other services, (per hour) *	£6.60	£6.80	£0.20	3.03%		
						2,000	5
Support Services and Care connect 24/7 for HRA tenants	Housing related support (includes all services shown under careline alarms)	£19.65	£20.20	£0.55	2.80%		
	Additional pendant for 2nd service user (additional weekly charge) (50 weeks)	£0.50	£0.55				
	Independent living and flexi care support charge for previous HRS protected clients and new residents entitled to HB	£10.50	£11.00	£0.50	4.76%		
	response service for new customers (50 weeks)	£8.70	£8.70	£0.00	0.00%		
	Response service to other provider equipment (50 weeks)*	£4.90	£5.00	£0.10	2.12%		
	Monitoring only service (50 weeks) *	£3.90	£4.20	£0.30	7.69%		
						587,385	13,873
Care Connect 24/7 alarm - private (Shortfall funded from General Fund)	Response service (52 weeks) *	£8.70	£9.00	£0.30	3.45%		
	Additional pendant (52 weeks)*	£0.60	£0.70				
	Response service out of area (52 weeks)*	£8.70	£8.70	£0.00	0.00%		
	Response service to other provider equipment (52 weeks)*	£4.90	£5.00	£0.10	2.12%		
	Monitoring only service (52 weeks) *	£3.90	£4.20	£0.30	7.69%		
						128,000	2,600
	Winkhaus keys	£15.90	£15.90	£0.00	0.00%		
	Fobs - Sheltered Schemes (Black)	£25.40	£26.20	£0.80	3.13%		
	Fobs - Sheltered Schemes (Shark)	£15.20	£15.70	£0.50	3.26%		
Replacement Pendants	Tynetec pendant	£66.10	£68.10	£2.00	3.03%		
	Chiptech	£58.30	£60.00	£1.70	2.92%		
Key safe	Supply	£23.20	£23.90	£0.70	3.02%		
						4,177	37
<b>General Needs Tenants and Leaseholders:</b>							
Key Fobs	Old Style "Black fobs"	£25.40	£26.20	£0.80	3.13%		
	New "Shark" Fobs*	£15.20	£15.70	£0.50	3.26%		
Communal door entry keys	Replacement keys for entry doors to flat blocks.	£24.30	£25.00	£0.70	2.88%		
Laundry charges - Roundmead	Wash tokens	£6.90	£7.10	£0.20	2.90%		
	Dry Tokens	£3.70	£3.80	£0.10	2.81%		
Management Fees for Westwood Court & Kilner Close	Administration Fees	£1.40	£1.45	£0.05	3.28%		
Joint to Sole	Administration Fees	£0.00	£50.00	£50.00	New Charge		
Sole to Joint	Administration Fees	£0.00	£50.00	£50.00	New Charge		
Mutual Exchanges	Administration Fees	£0.00	£50.00	£50.00	New Charge		
Non-Statutory Succession	Administration Fees	£0.00	£50.00	£50.00	New Charge		
						1,987	3,059



## HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT FEES AND CHARGE PROPOSED 2026/27

Service	Details	2025/26 Fee	2026/27 Proposed Fee	2026-27 Proposed Increase (£)	2026-27 Proposed Increase (%)	Working Budget 2025/26	Budget Increase (from fee proposals)
<b>Stores</b>	Use of store	£7.70	£7.90	£0.20	2.60%		
<b>Lock change</b>	Callout	£167.80	£173.00	£5.20	3.10%		
	Admin charge	£60.10	£61.90	£1.80	3.00%		
						17,521	381
<b>Tenant's Retrospective Charges</b>							
Inspection charge - depending on cost of work	From £0 to £999	£258.80	£267.00	£8.20	3.17%		
	From £1,000 to £1,999	£264.30	£272.00	£7.70	2.91%		
	From £2,000 to £2,999	£286.30	£295.00	£8.70	3.04%		
	From £3,000 to £3,999	£297.30	£306.00	£8.70	2.93%		
	From £4,000 to £4,999	£352.40	£363.00	£10.60	3.01%		
	From £5,000 to £5,999	£473.50	£487.00	£13.50	2.85%		
Adminstration	Administration	£187.20	£193.00	£5.80	3.10%		
						6,720	0
<b>Leasehold charges for services ( VAT not applicable. All fees are additional income for SBC)</b>							
Solicitors enquiries/standard pre-sale enquiries*	10 working day response - from date of payment	£209.20	£215.00	£5.80	2.77%		
Solicitors enquiries/standard pre-sale enquiries*	3 working day response - from date of payment	£319.30	£329.00	£9.70	3.04%		
Re-mortgage enquiries*	Enquiries raised at a time of remortgaging	£99.10	£102.00	£2.90	2.93%		
Redemption of Mortgage	Enquiries raised at a time of remortgaging	£115.00	£119.00	£4.00	3.48%		
Applications for consent for additional borrowing and Postponement of Right To Buy Discount Charge	Enquiries raised at a time of remortgaging	£90.00	£93.00	£3.00	3.33%		
Copy of lease*	fee for providing a copy of the lease	£49.50	£51.00	£1.50	3.03%		
Copy Transfers	fee for providing a copy of the lease	£50.00	£52.00	£2.00	4.00%		
Copies of quarterly service charge invoice*	additional inspection fee	£44.00	£45.30	£1.30	2.95%		
Copies of service charge estimate or actual statement*	additional inspection fee	£44.00	£45.30	£1.30	2.95%		
Deed of Postponement		£143.10	£147.00	£3.90	2.73%		
Notice of Charge		£49.50	£51.00	£1.50	3.03%		
Notice of Transfer/Assignment		£49.50	£51.00	£1.50	3.03%		
Lease extension	Valuation fee	£385.40	£397.00	£11.60	3.01%		
	Legal fee	£836.90	£862.00	£25.10	3.00%		
	Administration fee	£198.20	£204.00	£5.80	2.93%		
	Deposit - £260 or 10% of the premium, whichever is higher	£286.30	£295.00	£8.70	3.04%		
Collective enfranchisement	Valuation fee	£803.80	£828.00	£24.20	3.01%		
	Legal fee	£836.90	£862.00	£25.10	3.00%		
	Administration fee	£198.20	£204.00	£5.80	2.93%		
Consent fee/sub let fee	Cost of requesting permission to sublet the property	£77.10	£79.40	£2.30	2.98%		
						0	5,280
<b>Leasehold Alterations</b>							
Minor alterations - these are internal works within the demised premises that do not require planning permission or building control approval	Pre-application advice (non-refundable)	£220.20	£227.00	£6.80	3.09%		
	Minor application consideration and decision (non-refundable)	£440.50	£454.00	£13.50	3.06%		
	Letter licence - deed	£297.30	£306.00	£8.70	2.93%		
	Full licence - issued by Building Surveyor	£451.50	£465.00	£13.50	2.99%		
	Extension of the letter licence period	£264.30	£272.00	£7.70	2.91%		
Major alterations	Pre-application advice (non-refundable)	£264.30	£272.00	£7.70	2.91%		
	Major application consideration and decision (non-refundable)	£715.70	£737.00	£21.30	2.98%		
	Landlord licence - deed	£517.50	£533.00	£15.50	3.00%		
	Supplemental lease/deed of variation additional premises/restrictions)	£231.20	£238.00	£6.80	2.94%		
	Extension of the letter licence period	£352.40	£363.00	£10.60	3.01%		
Minor alterations - these are internal works within the demised premises that do not require planning permission or building control approval	Pre-application advice (non-refundable)	£313.80	£323.00	£9.20	2.93%		
	Minor application consideration and decision (non-refundable)	£578.10	£595.00	£16.90	2.92%		
	Retrospective letter licence	£473.50	£488.00	£14.50	3.06%		



# HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT FEES AND CHARGE PROPOSED 2026/27

Appendix B

Service	Details	2025/26 Fee	2026/27 Propossed Fee	2026-27 Proposed Increase (£)	2026-27 Proposed Increase (%)	Working Budget 2025/26	Budget Increase (from fee proposals)
		£0.00					
Major alterations	Pre-application advice (non-refundable)	£357.90	£369.00	£11.10	3.10%		
	Major application consideration and decision (non-refundable)	£1,035.10	£1,066.00	£30.90	2.99%		
	Supplemental lease (extension of demised premises)	£451.50	£465.00	£13.50	2.99%		
	Landlord licence - deed	£737.80	£760.00	£22.20	3.01%		
Unauthorised alterations (The cost of this will depend on whether it is Minor or Major Works and the figure given is the minimum for major works)	Minor assessment and ruling	£550.60	£567.00	£16.40	2.98%		
	Major assessment and ruling	£814.90	£839.00	£24.10	2.96%		
	Stop and make safe notification (including liaison with other council officers)	£401.90	£414.00	£12.10	3.01%		
	Re-instatement minor works	£814.90	£839.00	£24.10	2.96%		
	Re-instatement major works	£1,079.10	£1,111.00	£31.90	2.96%		
						0	0
	<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>					<b>£775,638</b>	<b>£24,271</b>



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## APPENDIX C: RISK BASED ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL OF HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BALANCES 2026/27

Potential Risk Area	Comments including any mitigation factors		
Income from areas within the base budget where the Council raises "Fees and Charges"	There is a potential risk that the budgeted income from activities where the Council charges for services will not be achieved. This is largely anticipated due to the challenging economic conditions, but could also result from increased void rates, lower collection rates, and disputed bills. All "fees and charges" income is reviewed as part of the quarterly budget monitoring process. Budgets are profiled over the year based on previous experience.		
		<b>Calculated Risk</b>	
Specific Areas	Estimated Income	Risk assessed at	Balances Required
Rechargeable works not raised or recovered	-£153,790	10.00%	£15,379
Leaseholder charges not realised (excluding insurance)	-£1,480,210	5.00%	£74,011
Rental income (increase in voids rates)	-£53,332,290	1.00%	£533,323
Service Charges (increase in voids rates)	-£3,567,320	1.00%	£35,673
Heating charges	-£639,350	5.00%	£31,968
<b>Total</b>			<b>£690,353</b>

Potential Risk Area	Comments		
Demand Led Budgets	There is a potential risk that spending on parts of the budget where the Council has a legal duty to provide services will increase significantly, including due to regulatory requirements. Individual budgets are reviewed as part of the quarterly budget monitoring process. Budgets are profiled over the year based on previous experience, so any variances should be identified during the year.		
		<b>Calculated Risk</b>	
Specific Areas	Estimated Exposure	Risk assessed at	Balances Required
Storm damage and fire damage uninsured costs (excess is £25,000 for fire damage)	£25,000	100.00%	£25,000
Response and Emergency repairs increase as a result of inflationary pressures or unforeseen repairs	£15,859,220	10.00%	£1,585,922
Unforeseen Capital works not budgeted for requiring a contribution to capital (based on a proportion of the capital programme)	£75,635,000	3.00%	£2,269,050
Inflation pressures on capital works requiring additional revenue resources to fund the shortfall	£75,635,000	1.00%	£756,350
There is an insufficient budget identified for Void, Fencing, Aids and Adaptation, and Damp and Mould and compliance work.	£1,500,000	50.00%	£750,000
<b>Total</b>			<b>£5,386,322</b>

Potential Risk Area	Comments including any mitigation factors		
Changes since budget was set	Potential risk that things change since the budget estimates were made and the estimates are then under budgeted for.		
		<b>Calculated Risk</b>	
Specific Areas	Estimated Exposure	Risk assessed at	Balances Required
Transitional Vacancy Rate 4.5% not achieved	£372,420	5.00%	£18,621
Increase in bad debt provision	£488,220	5.00%	£24,411
Utility inflation (Electricity increase in April 2025, Gas increase from Oct 2025 )	£1,428,280	5.00%	£71,414
Pay award is higher than budgeted for	£14,494,050	1.00%	£144,941
<b>Total</b>			<b>£259,387</b>



## APPENDIX C: RISK BASED ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL OF HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BALANCES 2026/27

Potential Risk Area	Comments including any mitigation factors		
Other Risks	Potential risk that savings options will not be realised as a result of delay or unforeseen circumstances.		
		<b>Calculated Risk</b>	
Specific Areas	Estimated Exposure	Risk assessed at	Balances Required
Savings Options delayed or not realised over Medium Term (5 yrs)	£4,165,390	22.00%	£900,050
<b>Total</b>			<b>£900,050</b>

Potential Risk Area	Comments including any mitigation factors		
Estimated balances required for any over spend or under -recovery of expenditure	This calculation replaces the calculation based on Net Expenditure		
		<b>Calculated Risk</b>	
Specific Areas	Estimated Exposure	Risk assessed at	Balances Required
Gross Expenditure (excluding fixed interest costs and depreciation and RCCO and cost covered above)	£1,633,750.00	5.00%	£78,770
<b>Total</b>			<b>£78,770</b>

Potential Risk Area	Comments including any mitigation factors		
Greater exposure to interest rate changes	The latest Business Plan revision includes re-financing of existing debt and a higher level of borrowing in the first 5 years of the plan. To mitigate this reserve values have been increased related to future debt		
		<b>Calculated Risk</b>	
Specific Areas	Estimated Exposure	Risk assessed at	Balances Required
5 Year Assumed new borrowing - interest rates 1.25% higher than projected	£214,789,000	1.25%	£2,684,863
<b>Total</b>			<b>£2,684,863</b>

Level of Balances Assumed in Housing Revenue Account Based on risk

**£10,000,000**





HRA: Rent and Service Charge 2026/27

# Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) Form

December 2025 – December 2026

<b>Date created</b>	November 2025
<b>Approved by</b>	Executive/SLT
<b>Owner</b>	Assistant Director for Housing and Neighbourhoods
<b>Version</b>	1
<b>Author</b>	Simon Kiff, Head of Housing Operations
<b>Business Unit and Team</b>	Housing and Neighbourhoods, Housing Management

Please [click this link](#) to find the EqIA guidance toolkit for support in completing the following form.

For translations, braille or large print versions of this document please email  
[equalities@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@stevenage.gov.uk).



**First things first:**

**Does this policy, project, service, or other decision need an EqlA?**

<b>Title:</b>	<b>HRA Rent and Service Charges 2025/26</b>	
<b>Please answer Yes or No to the following questions:</b>		
Does it affect staff, service users or the wider community?	Yes	
Has it been identified as being important to particular groups of people?	Yes	
Does it or could it potentially affect different groups of people differently (unequal)?	Yes	
Does it relate to an area where there are known inequalities or exclusion issues?	Yes	
Will it have an impact on how other organisations operate?	No	
Is there potential for it to cause controversy or affect the council's reputation as a public service provider?	Yes	

<b>Where a positive impact is likely, will this help to:</b>	
Remove discrimination and harassment?	Yes
Promote equal opportunities?	Yes
Encourage good relations?	Yes

**If you answered 'Yes' to one or more of the above questions you should carry out an EqlA.**

Or if you answered 'No' to all of the questions and decide that your activity doesn't need an EqlA you must explain below why it has no relevance to equality and diversity.

You should reference the information you used to support your decision below and seek approval from your Assistant Director before confirming this by sending this page to [equalities@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@stevenage.gov.uk).

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# Equality Impact Assessment Form

For a policy, project, strategy, staff or service change, or other decision that is new, changing or under review

<b>What is being assessed?</b>		<b>HRA Rent and Service Charges 2025/26</b>			
Lead Assessor	Simon Kiff			Assessment team	Elizabeth Ddamulira Keith Reynoldson
Start date	April 2025	End date	April 2026		
When will the EqIA be reviewed? (Typically every 1 year)		Nov 2025			

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Who may be affected by the proposed project?	All tenants
What are the key aims of the proposed project?	<p>To assess the impact of the proposed rent increase and Service charge increase for 2025/26 on Stevenage Council tenants.</p> <p>As part of the government's 10-year rent settlement for social housing, announced in the Spending Review 2024, the government has confirmed that rents for social housing will be allowed to increase by Consumer Prices Index (CPI) +1% annually starting from 1 April 2026. However, a key aspect of this new settlement is the implementation of Social Rent convergence for properties where rents are currently below 'formula rent'.</p> <p>For 2025/26 the permitted increase to rents is CPI plus 1%, based on the September 25 CPI figure. This follows the previous Government's extension of the current settlement by one year. Rent increases will be permitted at up to 4.8 per cent after CPI rose by 3.8 per cent in the 12 months to September 2025.</p>



To increase the rent on dwellings from week commencing 7 April 2025 by 4.8%, which is an average increase to £128.72 for social rents, £193.21 for affordable rents and £158.43 for Low Start Shared Ownership homes per week (based on a 52-week year). This has been calculated in accordance with the current Rent Standard issued by the Government and the Council's Rent and Service Charge Policy which provides a framework for setting rents and service charges within legislative requirements. The rent and service charge income underpins the delivery of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan's key housing objectives to deliver effective services, to invest in its properties to ensure homes are of a modern standard and to provide new social housing to rent. The policy has been reviewed and is subject to governance approvals.

Rent convergence will allow Social Rent properties that are currently charging rents below the 'formula rent' to gradually increase above the CPI +1% cap until they "converge" with the national formula rent level. This means that rents will rise by an additional amount each year, above the CPI +1% limit, until they match the formula rent target.

This mechanism was originally introduced in 2002 but was scrapped in 2015. With the new rent settlement, the government is set to reintroduce this convergence mechanism, but the precise implementation details are not expected until January 2026.

Rent convergence could have significant implications for tenants, particularly those in Social Rent properties where rents are currently below the formula rent level. These tenants may face higher annual rent increases than under the standard CPI +1% cap

However, whether it is £1, £2, or £3, this increase will still be covered by Universal Credit (UC) or Housing Benefit (HB) as long as the rent does not exceed the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. Council rent levels are still within this rate so will not be affected. This is a crucial point for assessing the impact on different protected characteristic groups, as it means that tenants receiving benefits will not be financially burdened by the rent increase.

What **positive measures** are in place (if any) to help **fulfil our legislative duties** to:

Remove discrimination & harassment

Promote equal opportunities

The aim of the Rent & Service Charge

Encourage good relations



			Policy is to provide a fair method of calculating rents and service charges for all of our tenants. It also aligns with the Council's Concessions for Fees and Charges Policy, and the principle of recovering the cost of providing services.		
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What sources of data / information are you using to inform your assessment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing, February 2019</li> <li>• Direction on the Rent Standard, 2019</li> <li>• Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016</li> <li>• Housing and Planning Act 2016</li> <li>• Rent and service charge policy agreed by Exec December 2019 and recommended to Council in January 2020</li> <li>• Rent account information</li> <li>• Housing System data (NEC)</li> <li>• Supported housing service data</li> </ul>
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In assessing the potential impact on people, are there	<p>The average rent increase for 2025/26 is 4.8%, in line with the current rent standard.</p> <p>When calculating rents and service charges, consideration will be taken of the need to balance any increase in the combined rent and service charge with the potential financial impact on</p>
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any overall comments that you would like to make?

customers. This relates to 35% of homes to which a service charge applies, which are predominantly flats as well as sheltered accommodation. The Council aims to recover the actual cost of providing the service, as they change due to inflationary pressures and changes in usage.

The impact of the 2025/26 rent increase and service charges is

- 7,341 homes or 93% receive a rent and service charge increase below £7 per week;
- If rent convergence is agreed by the Government with a £1 cap, 7,451 homes or 94% will receive a rent and service charge increase below £8.50 per week.

We had 6,703 general social rented properties, 65 affordable rent properties, 836 Independent Living/Flexicare Accommodation and 79 LSSO as at October 2025. The setting of a proportion of new build lets at affordable rents will contribute positively to increasing the supply of new homes in Stevenage. All target groups will benefit given the need for affordable housing is common across all socio-economic and minority groups. The current low supply of new affordable housing and the high cost of the private rented sector in Stevenage have impacted adversely on those groups whose incomes are average or below average.

This also further supports work with people who need help to live independently at home and those at risk of homelessness, through wider housing options, continued provision of support, and financial assistance for adaptations and more homelessness preventative programmes, respectively.

Any groups that are potentially disadvantaged are still expected to be able to benefit from a council property set at a social rent and receive benefit support to cover affordable rent properties.

## Evidence and Impact Assessment

Explain the potential impact and opportunities it could have for people in terms of the following characteristics, where applicable:



## Age

Positive impact	With the implementation of rent convergence, additional income will be received by SBC which allows for further investment for our HRA stock and help support with current financial pressures	Negative impact	Residents may be experiencing exceptional economic hardship as a result of the current economic environment. This may have a greater impact on older people and disabled people, who may have additional needs for heating and to run particular equipment and may also have lower income / be reliant on pensions and/or benefits (which have been increased in line with inflation). However, the rent increase including any rent convergence will be covered by UC or HB for those on low income.	Unequal impact	<p>The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups. A proportion of tenants may see an increase in service charges in any given year. The majority of tenants who are charged for services live in flats and/or independent living accommodation. Tenants living in independent living do so because they have additional needs that require support relating to age, disability or both. The minimum age for entry into independent living is 60 years and data from Northgate indicates that the proportion of tenants aged 60+ in independent living, is almost three times the proportion for all tenant housing.</p> <p>In relation to flat blocks, the data indicates that there is a higher proportion of people aged 18-29 years in flat blocks compared with all SBC housing who may also struggle to pay.</p> <p>For people living in independent living/flexicare schemes, in addition to basic rent and service charges, those who pay for the support/emergency response services that are not eligible for Housing benefit may see an increase in overall payment due each week.</p> <p>We currently know that the general economic challenges and Cost of Living</p>
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					are disproportionately of particular risk to older people and those with underlying conditions. This may result in in this age group incurring extra expenses that may affect their ability to pay rent and service charges.
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	See page 5				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	Ongoing and day to day consultation will take place with residents in 2025/26 to establish the impact of the rent & service charge increase. Please also refer to the mitigations outlined in the socio-economic section below, most of which will also apply to this protected characteristic group.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)			



Disability e.g., physical impairment, mental ill health, learning difficulties, long-standing illness					
Positive impact		Negative impact	Residents may be experiencing exceptional economic hardship as a result of the cost of living crisis, and increases in energy, food, and fuel costs in particular. This may have a greater impact on people with a disability, who may have additional needs for heating and to run particular equipment, and may also have lower income / be reliant on benefits (which have been increased in line with inflation) The Welfare Advice and Debt team will provide to support to ensure that this group attracts maximum income to through benefits, however the rent increase including any rent convergence will be covered by UC or HB for those on low income.	Unequal impact	The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups. Northgate data on tenants in relation to disability is collected at the lettings stage and in most cases their circumstances may change and recorded as and when we are updated. Some tenants may not have provided it.
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	See page two and three.				
What opportunities are there to promote			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		



equality and inclusion?			
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### Gender Reassignment

Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	There is no evidence to suggest any specific impacts on customers within any of these protected characteristic groups.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

### Marriage or Civil Partnership

Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	There is no evidence to suggest any specific impacts on customers within any of these protected characteristic groups.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

### Pregnancy & Maternity

Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
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Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	There is no evidence to suggest any specific impacts on customers within any of these protected characteristic groups.			
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	

Race					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	There is no evidence to suggest any specific impacts on customers within any of these protected characteristic groups.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

Religion or Belief					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	There is no evidence to suggest any specific impacts on customers within any of these protected characteristic groups.				



What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	
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Sex					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	There is no evidence to suggest any specific impacts on customers within any of these protected characteristic groups.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)			

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Sexual Orientation e.g., straight, lesbian / gay, bisexual					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	There is no evidence to suggest any specific impacts on customers within any of these protected characteristic groups.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)			



<b>Socio-economic<sup>1</sup></b> e.g., low income, unemployed, homelessness, caring responsibilities, access to internet, public transport users, social value in procurement					
Positive impact		Negative impact	Rent and Service Charge increase could negatively affect residents in a lower socio-economic standing as they will have a financial challenge.	Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	Northgate reports on those in rent and service charge arrears and those supported. At the end of Q2 2025 35% were in rent arrears.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	Identify and support those who are struggling utilising various support streams such as downsizing for those who are under occupying.		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

<b>Additional Considerations</b> Please outline any other potential impact on people in any other contexts					
Positive impact		Negative impact	The rent increase for 2025/2026 will be applied across all tenancies regardless of circumstances. Those reliant on Housing Benefit (HB) and Universal Credit (UC) Housing costs to cover their full rent and	Unequal impact	

<sup>1</sup>Although non-statutory, the council has chosen to implement the Socio-Economic Duty and so decision-makers should use their discretion to consider the impact on people with a socio-economic disadvantage.



			<p>eligible service charges will not be affected by the increase in rent and service charges as their benefit award will be recalculated. Those who receive partial or do not receive any benefits and experience affordability challenges will be supported accordingly.</p> <p>The number of bids on the new build properties let at affordable rents are similar to the number received for new build let at social rents. There is a mixture of employed and unemployed applicants. Applicants in receipt of benefits are not excluded or unfairly treated.</p> <p>Those who receive services for which a service charge is made will be charged the actual cost of those services. Heating and Water charges are exempt from HB and tenants are expected to pay this from other income or benefits.</p> <p>Residents may be experiencing exceptional economic hardship as a result of the current economic environment with increases in energy, food, and fuel costs in particular. We will use the Household Support Fund to assist those identified as in need.</p> <p>Households in the general rented homes, especially those on lower incomes, in general pay more of their income on housing costs and have less resilience to cope with financial shocks. This is anticipated to lead to a significant increase in fuel poverty. Income services Team will</p>		
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			monitor this and provide or signpost to support.		
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	See page two and three				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	<p>The policy allows for capping of service charges, subject to any legal constraints. As a means of mitigating the impact of an increase that would cause hardship, the council may subsidise the costs.</p> <p>Rent increase information will be published on the Council website early February 2025 to start preparing tenants.</p> <p>The rent notification letter (to be sent out at the end of February) will offer tenants the opportunity to discuss any queries they have with staff. It will explain why the rent has increased and also explain any increase in service charges.</p> <p>Where support charges are also included (mainly but not exclusively for sheltered and flexi care schemes) separate notifications will be sent out to these residents to ensure it is clearly set out how each element of the weekly charge is made up.</p>	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	<p>Staff in the Income Services and Finance team will closely monitor, through day-to-day income management and tenant account management, to establish the impact of the rent &amp; service charge increase and put in place systems to mitigate this accordingly. This is done in April and May. Please also refer to the mitigations outlined in the socio-economic section above</p>		



To ensure that this is explained as clearly as possible there will be a FAQ sheet and details on the website and hard copies available for those who need them.

The policy states that the Council will have regard to the Local Housing Allowance when setting affordable rents. If affordable rents are set at this level, HB/ UC housing cost will cover the rent in full for those tenants who are entitled to the maximum amount of housing benefit. Setting at the Local Housing Allowance will also benefit tenants who are, for example on a low wage or zero-hour contracts and where partial housing benefit can be paid.

For those moving into Affordable Rent (AR) properties a comprehensive affordability assessment is carried out prior to offer to ensure that the tenancy is sustainable.

The implementation of the policy in respect of Affordable Rent will be kept under review by the Housing Development Working Group and should adverse impacts be identified this will inform future decision making in this regard.

Support provision for this group has been increased as part of an Income Recovery Action plan and it has been extended for a further 2 years to ensure



	<p>that they can pay through sustainable arrangements to maintain payments towards rent and service charges and have access to required support.</p> <p>The Council will make links to support and guidance clear on all of its communication platforms.</p> <p>The Council will prepare staff to enable them to respond effectively and empathetically with tenants.</p>		
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## Consultation Findings

Document any feedback gained from the following groups of people:

Staff?	N/A	Residents?	Staff in the income services and Finance team will closely monitor through day-to-day income management and tenant account management to establish impact of the rent & service charge increase and put in place systems to mitigate this accordingly. This is done in April and May. Please also refer to the mitigations outlined in the socio-economic section above.
Voluntary & community sector?	N/A	Partners?	N/A
Other stakeholders?	The report will go through the Council's pre-budget scrutiny meetings before being presented to the Full Council in January.		



## Overall Conclusion & Future Activity

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Explain the <b>overall findings</b> of the assessment and <b>reasons for outcome</b> (please choose one):		
1. No inequality, inclusion issues or opportunities to further improve have been identified		
Negative / unequal impact, barriers to inclusion or improvement opportunities identified	2a. Adjustments made	
	2b. Continue as planned	<p>The future viability of the HRA Business Plan is reliant upon us being able to maximise income collection, recover arrears and the costs of service provision where it is possible to do so.</p> <p>Only a proportion of new builds will be at affordable rent in line with the revised HRA Budget plan. The proposal to offer a mix of new build rents at affordable rent levels and at social rent levels would result in additional income to the HRA over 30 years which makes a significant contribution to the sustainability of the plan and the Council's ability to build new homes and to deliver other housing priorities.</p>
	2c. Stop and remove	

Detail the <b>actions that are needed</b> as a result of this assessment and how they will help to <b>remove discrimination &amp; harassment, promote equal opportunities</b> and / or <b>encourage good relations</b> :				
Action	Will this help to remove, promote and / or encourage?	Responsible officer	Deadline	How will this be embedded as business as usual?
Monitor through day to day income management and tenant account management to establish to establish the	Remove discrimination and promote equal opportunities.	Elizabeth Ddamulira	Oct 2026	Current practice is to assess cases or groups that are experiencing challenges and putting in place processes



impact of the rent increase challenges relating to affordability and provide tenants with support accordingly	Put in place systems to mitigate this accordingly			and systems to mitigate impacts.

**To be Approved by Cabinet (December 2025)**

**Date: 10/12/2025**

Please send this EqlA to [equalities@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@stevenage.gov.uk) for critical friend feedback and for final submittance with the associated project.



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## APPENDIX E - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT CAPITAL STRATEGY

	2025/26	2025/26	2025/26	2026/27	2027/2028	2028/2029	2029/2030	2030/2031
Scheme	Q2 Capital Strategy	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy	Variance 26/27 Budget v Q2	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
<b>SUMMARY</b>								
Capital Programme Excl New Build (Housing Inv)	22,665,090	22,665,090		33,068,555	30,882,238	30,173,478	30,281,460	29,530,314
New Build (Housing Development)	16,405,476	17,575,476	1,170,000	42,347,192	13,796,808	6,500,000	11,000,000	8,400,000
Other Capital Schemes	316,037	316,037		219,000	1,120,000	1,287,400	922,084	784,000
<b>TOTAL HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME</b>	<b>39,386,603</b>	<b>40,556,603</b>	<b>1,170,000</b>	<b>75,634,747</b>	<b>45,799,046</b>	<b>37,960,878</b>	<b>42,203,544</b>	<b>38,714,314</b>
<b>HRA USE OF RESOURCES</b>								
MRR (Self Financing Depreciation)	13,138,170	13,138,170		13,630,230	14,043,962	14,792,893	15,221,343	15,662,969
Other Capital Receipts	-	-		500,000	-	-	-	-
Section 20 Contribution (leaseholders income)	2,957,878	2,957,878		3,841,037	3,453,764	3,714,158	2,900,800	942,462
(RTB) new Build provision	3,153,844	3,153,844		9,451,096	3,904,904	3,250,000	5,500,000	4,200,000
RTB - Debt Provision Receipts	1,661,487	1,661,487		688,600	285,100	293,600	302,400	311,500
Borrowing Prudential	11,196,331	11,196,331		35,608,000	16,604,000	15,910,000	18,279,000	17,597,000
Direct Revenue Financing (was RCCO)	-	-		598,784	1,584,316	227	-	384
Grant	7,278,893	8,448,893	1,170,000	11,317,000	5,923,000	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL HRA RESOURCES FOR CAPITAL</b>	<b>39,386,603</b>	<b>40,556,603</b>	<b>1,170,000</b>	<b>75,634,747</b>	<b>45,799,046</b>	<b>37,960,878</b>	<b>42,203,543</b>	<b>38,714,314</b>
<b>CAPITAL PROGRAMME EXCL. NEW BUILD</b>								
<b>Planned Investment including Decent Homes</b>								
<b>Decent Homes - Internal/External Works</b>	<b>8,430,690</b>	<b>8,430,690</b>		<b>19,703,855</b>	<b>21,078,338</b>	<b>20,235,978</b>	<b>20,308,360</b>	<b>19,804,614</b>
Decent Homes Internal/External Works Voids	465,500	465,500		635,000	619,400	617,200	619,400	604,000
Decent Homes Internal/One off Heating Works	3,620,540	3,620,540		6,508,855	6,193,938	4,545,278	4,561,460	4,448,014
Decent Homes Electrical	155,170	155,170		264,600	258,100	576,100	578,200	563,900
Decent Homes Kitchens and Bathrooms	1,965,440	1,965,440		4,656,600	4,542,200	4,526,200	4,542,400	4,429,800
Window and Door Replacement	2,068,880	2,068,880		6,350,000	6,607,000	6,583,600	6,607,200	6,443,400
Roofing	103,440	103,440		455,100	443,900	257,200	258,100	251,700
Decent Homes - Extractor Fans				264,600	1,858,200	2,571,700	2,580,900	2,516,900
Decent Homes 2				84,700	82,600	82,300	82,600	80,600
Decent Home External Works				423,300	412,900	411,500	413,000	402,800
Insulation Measures	51,720	51,720		61,100	60,100	64,900	65,100	63,500



## APPENDIX E - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT CAPITAL STRATEGY

	2025/26	2025/26	2025/26	2026/27	2027/2028	2028/2029	2029/2030	2030/2031
Scheme	Q2 Capital Strategy	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy	Variance 26/27 Budget v Q2	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
<b>Decent Homes - Flat Blocks</b>	<b>10,176,410</b>	<b>10,176,410</b>		<b>4,612,900</b>	<b>2,660,400</b>	<b>2,736,400</b>	<b>2,746,200</b>	<b>2,678,100</b>
MRC Flat Blocks - Wates	779,573	779,573						
MRC Flat Blocks - Mulalley	5,920,237	5,920,237		1,058,300				
MRC Flat Blocks - Misc	106,890	106,890		670,700	435,100	333,800	335,000	326,700
Communal Heating	59,440	59,440		238,100	120,300	129,900	130,400	127,200
High Rises - Improvement Works	3,310,270	3,310,270		2,645,800	2,105,000	2,272,700	2,280,800	2,224,200
<b><u>Health &amp; Safety</u></b>								
Asbestos Management	250,000	250,000		367,100	358,100	389,600	391,000	381,300
Subsidence	124,130	124,130		195,800	191,000	190,300	191,000	186,300
Contingent Major Repairs	577,550	577,550		611,300	601,400	649,400	651,700	635,500
Building safety	870,000	870,000		2,667,000	1,202,900	1,198,600	1,202,900	1,173,100
<b><u>Estate &amp; Communal Area</u></b>								
Asset Review - Challenging Assets	464,400	464,400		635,000	619,400	617,200	619,400	604,000
<b><u>Other HRA Schemes</u></b>								
Stock condition Surveys	159,310	159,310		169,300	165,200	164,600	165,200	161,100
Decarbonisation	825,000	825,000		2,804,600	2,735,700	2,726,100	2,735,900	2,668,000
Disabled Adaptations	787,600	787,600		1,270,000	1,238,800	1,234,400	1,238,800	1,208,100
Capital Equipment				31,700	31,000	30,900	31,000	30,200
<b>TOTAL CAPITAL PROGRAMME EXCL. NEW BUILD</b>	<b>22,665,090</b>	<b>22,665,090</b>		<b>33,068,555</b>	<b>30,882,238</b>	<b>30,173,478</b>	<b>30,281,460</b>	<b>29,530,314</b>
<b><u>CAPITAL PROGRAMME NEW BUILD</u></b>								
<b>New Build Programme - eligible for 1-4-1</b>	<b>9,208,917</b>	<b>10,378,917</b>	<b>1,170,000</b>	<b>18,902,192</b>	<b>7,809,808</b>	<b>6,500,000</b>	<b>11,000,000</b>	<b>8,400,000</b>
<b>New Build Programme - ineligible</b>	<b>7,196,559</b>	<b>7,196,559</b>		<b>23,445,000</b>	<b>5,987,000</b>			
March Hare in Burwell Road (Ineligible 141)	1,732,959	1,732,959		1,000,000				
Kenilworth Close (105 units) (Ineligible 141)	171,497	171,497						
Dunn Close (27 units, 21 main block SA)	456,177	456,177						
North Road	120	120						
Brent Court Social Rent (Ineligible 141)	7,052,893	7,052,893		22,445,000	5,987,000			



## APPENDIX E - HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT CAPITAL STRATEGY

	2025/26	2025/26	2025/26	2026/27	2027/2028	2028/2029	2029/2030	2030/2031
Scheme	Q2 Capital Strategy	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy	Variance 26/27 Budget v Q2	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy	HRA Budget 26/27 Capital Strategy
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
<b>Schemes Under Development</b>	<b>6,991,830</b>	<b>8,161,830</b>	<b>1,170,000</b>	<b>18,902,192</b>	<b>7,809,808</b>	<b>8,400,000</b>	<b>8,400,000</b>	<b>8,400,000</b>
The Oval (70 Units)	6,096,708	5,766,708	(330,000)	14,902,192	7,809,808			
Shephall Social	32,615	1,532,615	1,500,000	3,000,000				
Redcar Drive aka Cartref (Affordable Rent)	75,000	75,000						
Ellis Avenue (Social Rent)	453,899	453,899						
Ellis Avenue (Affordable Rent)	361,439	361,439		1,000,000				
Neighbourhood Centre Social Rent						3,250,000	5,500,000	4,200,000
Neighbourhood Centre Afford.Rent						3,250,000	5,500,000	4,200,000
L.S.S.O. Buy Back	(27,831)	(27,831)						
<b>TOTAL CAPITAL PROGRAMME NEW BUILD</b>	<b>16,405,476</b>	<b>17,575,476</b>	<b>1,170,000</b>	<b>42,347,192</b>	<b>13,796,808</b>	<b>6,500,000</b>	<b>11,000,000</b>	<b>8,400,000</b>
<b><u>OTHER CAPITAL SCHEMES</u></b>								
<b><u>IT General (IT)</u></b>								
Infrastructure Investment	147,564	147,564		199,000	740,000	764,000	764,000	764,000
Housing Improvements - Northgate online	118,670	118,670						
Core ICT Equipment Equipmt & Tools	20,000	20,000		20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	20,000
<b>Total General IT</b>	<b>286,234</b>	<b>286,234</b>		<b>219,000</b>	<b>760,000</b>	<b>784,000</b>	<b>784,000</b>	<b>784,000</b>
<b><u>Connected To Our Customers (CTOC)</u></b>								
New CRM Technology (Digital Platform)	29,803	29,803						
<b>Total CTOC</b>	<b>29,803</b>	<b>29,803</b>						
<b><u>Housing Maintenance Vehicles</u></b>								
Housing Improvements - Northgate online					360,000	503,400	138,084	
<b>Total Vehicles</b>					<b>360,000</b>	<b>503,400</b>	<b>138,084</b>	
<b>TOTAL OTHER CAPITAL SCHEMES</b>	<b>316,037</b>	<b>316,037</b>		<b>219,000</b>	<b>1,120,000</b>	<b>1,287,400</b>	<b>922,084</b>	<b>784,000</b>



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Part 1



Agenda item:

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**Meeting** CABINET

**Portfolio Area** RESOURCES AND PERFORMANCE

**Date** 14 January 2026



## DRAFT GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2026/27

### KEY DECISION

**Author** Clare Fletcher

**Contributors** Senior Leadership Team

**Lead Officer** Clare Fletcher

**Contact Officer** Clare Fletcher

### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider the Council's draft 2026/27 General Fund Budget, Council Tax Support Scheme and draft proposals for the 2025/26 Council Tax.
- 1.2 To set out the Council's approach to financial resilience and the measures taken to date to ensure that the General fund can withstand financial pressures such as higher inflation and historic lower government funding through its Balancing the Budget priority and associated activities as set out in Sections 4.5 and 4.12.
- 1.3 This report will also set out that an improved funding position enables the Council to set aside monies to cover Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Loan costs, reinvestment into capital projects otherwise not funded, new food waste service offer to residents, funding to support LGR transition as required by Govt, and the potential for some one-off initiatives.
- 1.4 To consider changes to the projected 2025/26 General Fund Budget.



## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 The 2025/26 revised net expenditure on the General Fund of **£10,540,490** is approved as set out in paragraph 4.8.1.
- 2.2 That for 2025/26 the sum of £250,000 is transferred to the Capital earmarked reserve to support the Draft Capital Strategy as set out in paragraphs 4.2.5-4.2.7.
- 2.3 The draft General Fund Budget for 2026/27 of **£13,586,060** is proposed (subject to additional growth of £800,000 as set out in section 4.9) for consultation purposes, with a contribution to balances of **£1,581** and a Band D Council Tax of **£253.78**, (assuming a 2.99% Council Tax increase).
- 2.4 The updated position on the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as summarised in section 4.11 be noted.
- 2.5 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, is approved.
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 The 2026/27 Balancing the Budget options as set out in section 4.5 and Appendix A, totalling **£84,640** for the General Fund, be included into the Council's budget setting processes for consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.8 That the pressures identified in sections 4.2 and 4.7 to this report are noted.
- 2.9 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 into the Council's budget setting processes for consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.10 That the sum set aside of Local Enterprise Board (LEP) loans of **£500,000** is approved for 2026/27 and for future years as a minimum as set out in paragraph 4.2.2 for subsequent years.
- 2.11 That for 2026/27 the sum of **£1,200,000** is approved to support the Draft Capital Strategy as set out in paragraphs 4.2.5-4.2.6.
- 2.12 That for 2026/27 Members approve the use of **£500,000** Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funding for the purchase of two new freighters as set out in paragraph 4.1.13.
- 2.13 That the sums included in the 2026/27 Budget for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) transition budgets of **£560,000** are approved and for future years as set out in paragraph 4.2.4.
- 2.14 That Members approve the approach to additional growth of **£600,000** as set out in section 4.9 of the report and be included into the Council's budget setting processes for consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

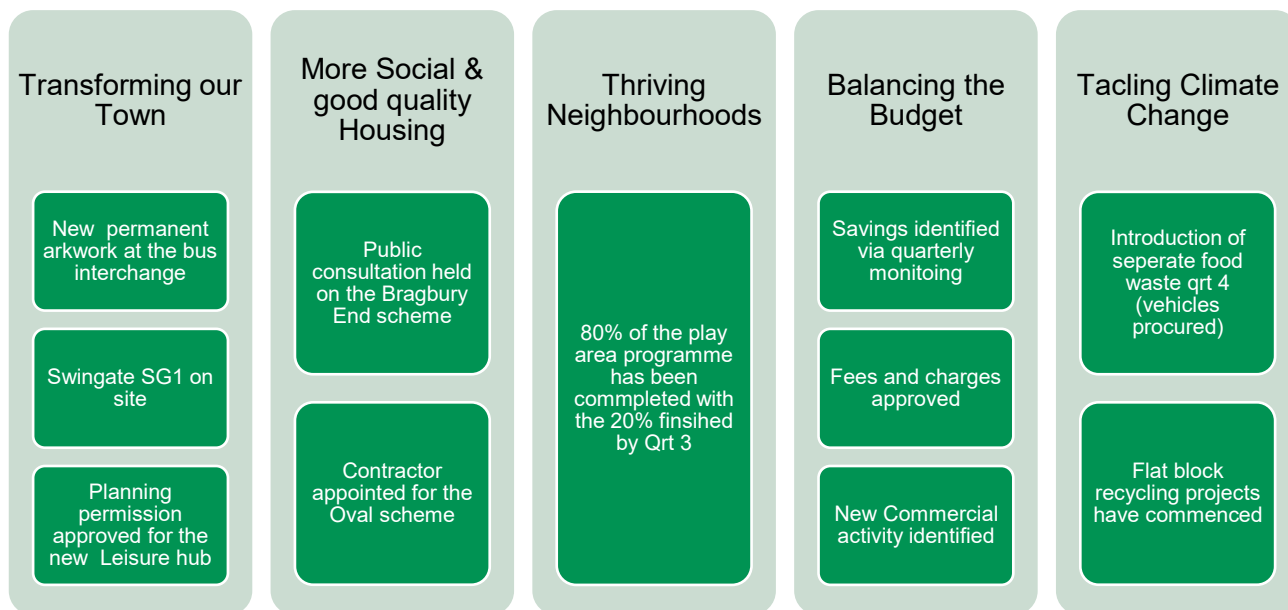


- 2.15 That Members approve the ringfencing of **£2,000,000** of Business Rates gain reserves for the repayment of LEP loans as set out in paragraph 4.11.5.
- 2.16 That the Section 25 Statement on Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserve as set out in Appendix D is approved.
- 2.17 That the Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) for the council tax increase of 2.99% is noted, (Appendix E)
- 2.18 That the decisions taken on recommendations 2.3 – 2.17 above be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework rules in the Council's Constitution.
- 2.19 Approval is granted for engagement to take place with key partners and other stakeholders in order for their views to be considered as part of the 2026/27 budget setting process.

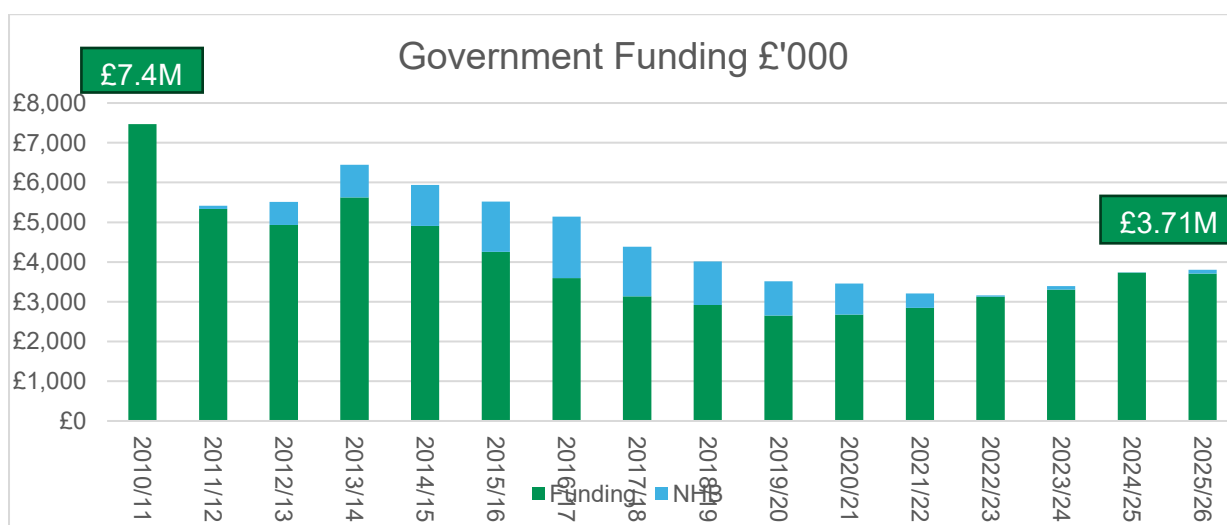
### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 This report sets out the 2026/27 draft General Fund Budget including Balancing the Budget (BTB) options, growth bids and pressures. The General Fund Budget forms part of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework. Under Article 4 of the Constitution, the Budget includes: the allocation of financial resources to different services and projects; proposed contingency funds; setting the council tax; the council tax support scheme; decisions relating to the control of the Council's borrowing requirement; the control of its capital expenditure; and the setting of virement limits.
- 3.2 The Council approved an ambitious new Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan in February 2024. It is essential that the Council employs a robust budget review and setting process in order to ensure that both front line service and Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan priorities can be achieved, even during Local government Reform. As such the budgets both revenue and capital provide the means through which delivery of core service and Corporate Plan objectives can be achieved.
- 3.3 A summary of some of the service and MSEB priority activities which have been delivered as a result of the budget setting activity for 2025/26 is set out below:



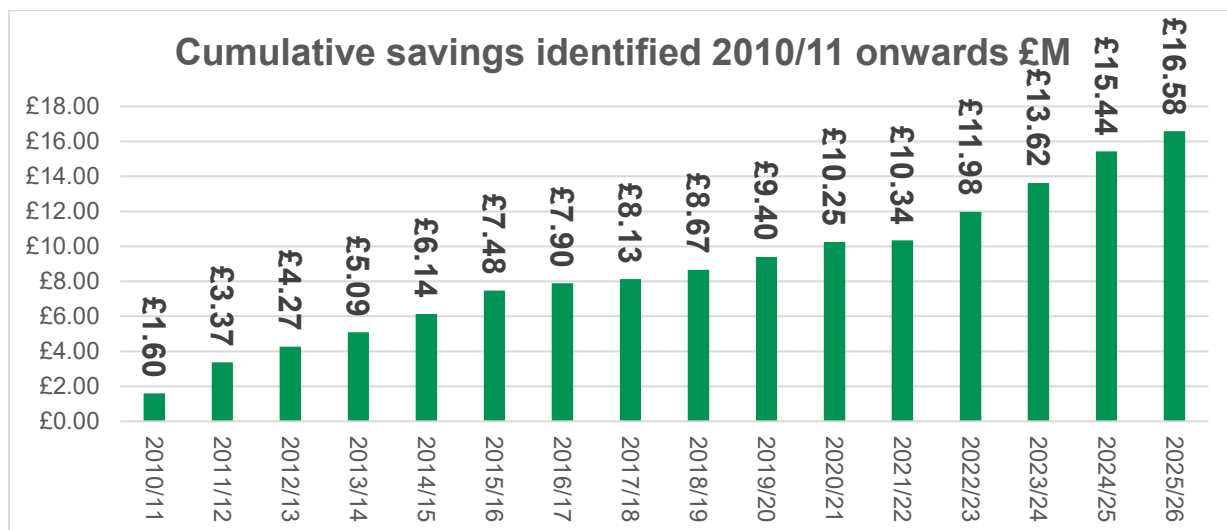


- 3.4 Funding for Council services reduced significantly between 2010/11-2019/20 during the period of austerity and lower government spending on the public sector and for Stevenage Brough Council this has meant a reduction in government support of £3.75Million up to and including 2025/26, excluding business rate gains.



- 3.5 This has historically meant the need to find annual savings while population size and unfunded pressures grew. The Council has had a major focus on addressing the resulting financial funding gap through its 'Balancing the Budget' priority and this report summarises the options for approved or recommended for approval for 2026/27. The Cabinet and Senior Leadership Team have recognised the need to plan on the basis of a three-year savings horizon to both balance the budget and ensure that there are options identified which can be delivered within the timescales required. Taking such an approach should minimise the need for service cuts. The cumulative savings identified to date since 2010/11 are circa £16Million as shown in the chart below.

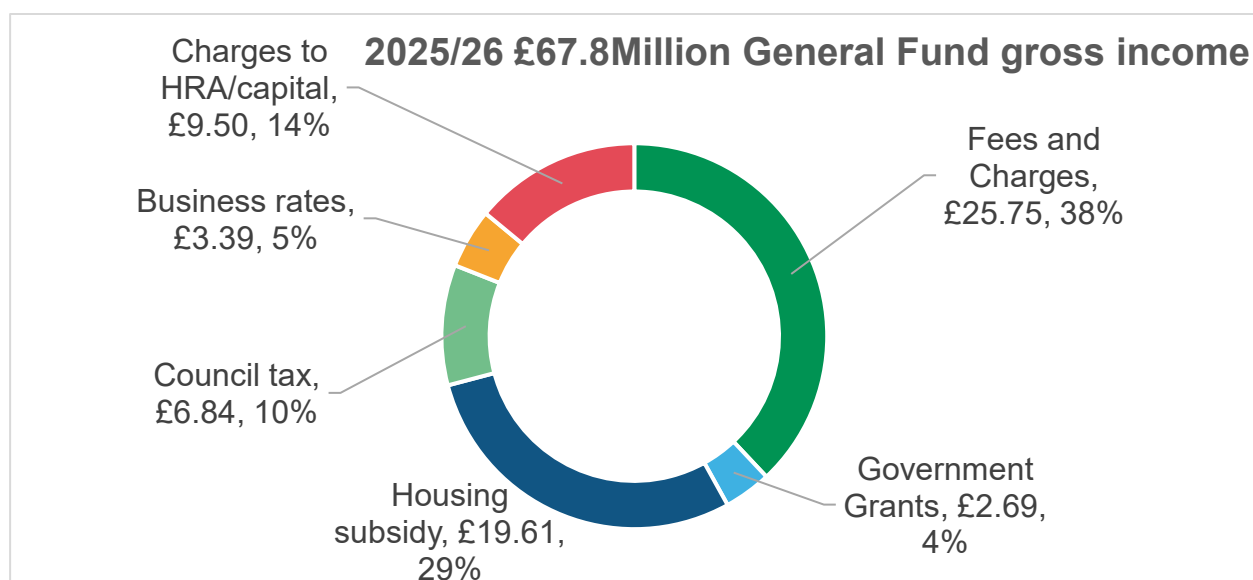




3.6 The 'Balancing the Budget' (BTB) funding gap identified in the September Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was £2.4Million prior to any known positive impact of Fair Funding for the period 2026/27-2028/29. This was updated in the November 2025 BTB report when the Fair Funding position was becoming clearer (see also section 4.1) with the outstanding savings gap of £1.15Million for the period 2027/28-2029/30 being able to be met from annual fees and charges increases with no further savings required.

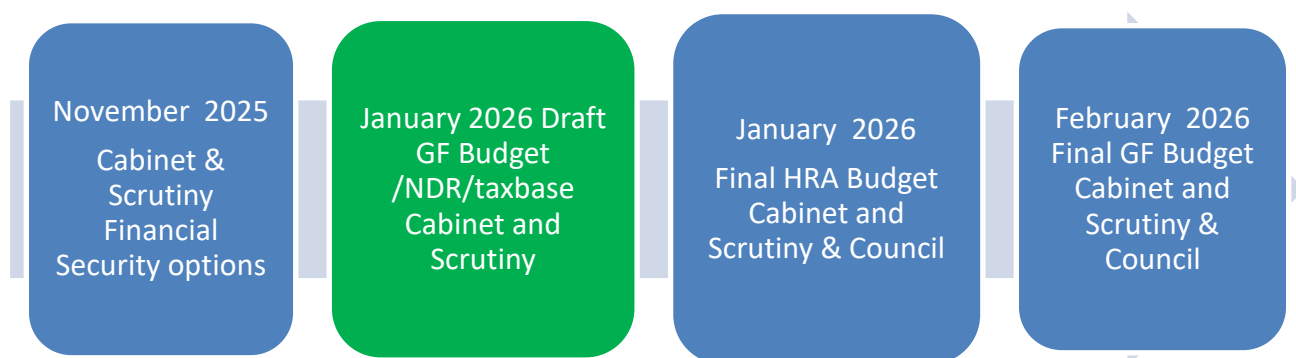
3.7 Since the November 2025 BTB report was approved the government published the individual Council provisional Finance Settlements for the period 2026/27-2028/29. A summary of what the Finance Settlement means for the Council is set out in section 4.1 and General Fund resource projections have been updated accordingly in the draft budget.

3.8 The level of expenditure and income incurred/received by the General Fund is summarised below using the original 2025/26 SBC General Fund budget which was £67.8Million but after taking into account fees and charges, government grants, services to the HRA/Capital and housing subsidy was a net budget of £10.7Million and is funded as set out below.





- 3.9 The Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules in the Constitution, prescribe the Budget setting process, which includes a consultation period. The timescale required to implement this process is outlined below.



#### 4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

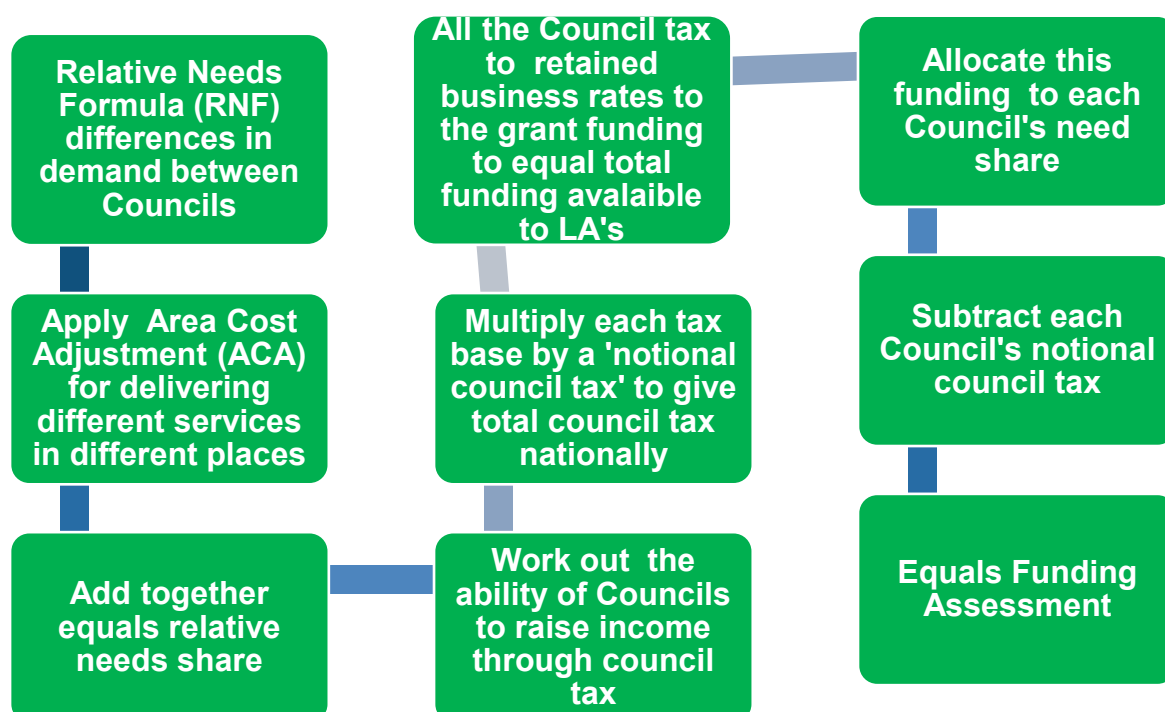
##### 4.1 Stevenage Borough Finance Settlement 2026/27-2028/29

- 4.1.1 The Government set out its plans to reform local government funding on the 20 June 2025 via a consultation document 'The Fair Funding review 2.0'. The system of Local Government funding had remained unchanged since localisation of business rates in 2013 and the plan was to change how money is allocated to Councils in England. The reforms aim was to account for the different needs and costs faced by communities across the country, including adjusting for the costs of remoteness faced by rural communities, and the ability of individual local authorities to raise Council Tax, while also resetting business rates income. This means an update to the formulae used to calculate funding allocations, which are a decade out of date. The aim was to make the system fairer and more current, so Councils get funding that better reflects their local needs based on a number of factors. So, from 2026/27, this revised system for allocating funding between Councils, will take account of those revisited factors of Councils' spending needs and their relative abilities to raise revenues themselves via council tax. The elements of the formula are listed below.

Fair Funding Factors	What It Means
<b>Relative Needs</b>	How much support a local area requires (e.g. for social care, housing, deprivation etc.)
<b>Area Costs</b>	How expensive it is to run services in that area (e.g. wages, property costs)
<b>Resource Adjustment</b>	How much money the council can raise itself (mainly through council tax)



4.1.2 The formulas are then applied based on the graphic below summarised below.



- 4.1.3 The criteria includes a 'Foundation Formula' for general services and then specific formulas for services like adult social care and temporary accommodation with adjustments for labour, property, and travel costs.
- 4.1.4 The UK government consulted on the proposed reforms between 20 June 2025 and 15 August 2025. To dampen any large swings in funding, the proposed changes will be phased in over three years to ease the transition for Authorities, with funding floors in place to limit losses for those receiving less funding under the new system than currently. However, unlike the previous system there is no ceiling on the amount of increase gaining Councils will receive.
- 4.1.5 The argument for reform is that it has not be reset for current demographic and deprivation factors and is based on no change to a government funding system since the introduction of 50% business rates retention in 2013/14, not to mention additional pressures faced by Councils today. However, the difficulty with a long overdue reset means any new scheme could and appears to lead to a significant redistribution of funding around the country.
- 4.1.6 Included in the funding consultation was the proposals for a full reset of the Business Rates Retention System for 2026/27. The aim is to ensure funding is targeted where it is needed most and restore the balance between aligning funding with need and rewarding business rates growth. The local share (the percentage share of locally collected business rates that will be retained by local government) will continue to be subject to redistribution across local government via 'top-ups' and 'tariffs'. Stevenage is a tariff authority and retains more business rate than the historic needs assessment and for 2025/26 the



estimated gains are £1.2Million. The re-set would see those gains reduce through a higher ‘tariff’ paid to the government with the reset now clarified to be based on the 2025/26 NNDR 1 submission and not 2024/25 actuals realised.

4.1.7 Alongside changes to government funding allocations the consultation document also proposes simplifying grant funding pots. In recent years, central Government has increasingly relied on ringfenced micro-grants in an attempt to ensure the continued delivery of specific departmental priorities. In 2025/26, over 300 grants were awarded to local government from across Whitehall. Research published by the LGA in 2020 found that there were nearly 250 different grants provided to local government, around a third of which were awarded on a competitive basis. The LGA research estimated that the average cost to Councils in pursuing each competitive grant was in the region of £30,000 costing each local authority roughly £2.25Million a year chasing down various pots of money across Whitehall (see also paragraph 4.1.12).

4.1.8 The Consultation response was published on 21 November 2025 and the following changes were made. Most notable are as follows:

Change	Impact on SBC
<b>Baseline for Funding (2025/26)</b>	
Pooling gains included in the calculation for business rates means Authorities which have been assigned levy savings will benefit from a more generous funding floor or, at a minimum, a three-year transition on this saving unwinding.	None not in a pool 2025/26
The recovery grant has been excluded £600Million (not all Councils received this in 2025/26).	SBC received £238K in 2025/26 and excluded from funding envelope
A portion of the £414 million children and families grant has been included.	
The temporary accommodation funding pot within FFR has been increased	SBC projected to receive more than previous estimate
<b>Change to Relative Needs Assessment</b>	
Changed a number of the formula and relative weighting specifically around adult and children social care indices.	Has had an impact on Districts overall (see chart below)
<b>Change to Relative Resources Adjustment</b>	
The main change is the confirmation of the notional council tax levels starting at £2,060 and growing to £2,160 and £2,265 over the three year period	improves funding position for SBC
For London Boroughs specifically, it may be that MHCLG might exclude 2.3% of the London taxbase from FFR altogether in recognition of non-fire GLA functions which sit outside of FFR	reduce overall funding



Change	Impact on SBC
The Government confirmed the treatment of around 50% of the £3.4 billion extra grant funding. This figure is cumulative and of £3.4 billion, around £1.75 billion will be allocated to adult and children's social care using the new formulae	reduce overall funding
As previously, the Business rates income is assumed to go up by inflation (this can be changed), and RSG has its own indexation assumption but also is top sliced to create the local authority better care grant for relevant authorities	increases/reduces funding

4.1.9 On 17 December 2025, the Secretary of State for the Ministry for Housing and Communities Local Government (MHCLG) released a written statement to Parliament on the provisional local government finance settlement 2026/27-2028/29. Over the three-year settlement period, Core Spending Power for all English councils (in aggregate) is expected to rise by 15.09% in cash terms. This compares to an estimated 3.3% cash increase for district councils, but for Stevenage there is bigger increase. The increase does include assumptions about increases in council tax, which accounts for an actual increase of 21% nationally\*.

	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Funding Settlement	£Million	£Million	£Million	£Million
Baseline Funding Level (NNDR)		£16,240	£16,613	£16,948
Legacy Business rates Retention funding	£18,770			
Revenue Support Grant		£15,048	£17,788	£17,948
Legacy grant funding	£11,033			
Grants rolled in	£543			
Improved Better Care Fund (included in RSG from 2027/28)	£2,640	£2,640		
Families First Partnership (within Children, Families and Youth Grant)	£523	£853	£853	£729
Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse	£725	£794	£816	£835
Recovery grant	£600	£600	£600	£600
Recovery grant guarantee		£149	£113	£99
Mayoral Capacity Funding	£34	£33	£33	£33
Fire and Rescue real-terms floor		£2	£6	£9
100% income protection floor		£41	£91	£143
95% income protection floor		£104	£256	£415
Council Tax Requirement exc. parish precepts	£38,656	£41,208	£44,012	£47,000



	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Funding Settlement	£Million	£Million	£Million	£Million
<b>Core Spending Power</b>	<b>£73,522</b>	<b>£77,712</b>	<b>£81,181</b>	<b>£84,759</b>

*\*A number of Councils have permission for higher increases where they are deemed to have lower than average council tax including Westminster, Wandsworth, Windsor & Maidenhead*

4.1.10 The Stevenage provisional settlement versus the previous modelling (which had no social care grants included in the overall funding pot is summarised below.

2025/26		2026/27		2027/28		2028/29	
Funding:	£'000	BTB £'000	settlement (£'000)	BTB £'000	settlement (£'000)	BTB £'000	settlement (£'000)
RSG	£149.0						
NNDR	£4,618.6						
Recovery grant	£283.8	£283.8	£283.8	£283.8	£283.8	£283.8	£283.8
NIC	£200.8						
NHB	£97.0						
NNDR Gains	£0.0	£0.0		£0.0		£0.0	
Food waste new burdens		£554.8		£554.8		£554.8	
Temporary accommodation grant	£556.8						
RSG			£2,849.5		£3,493.6		£4,130.0
Baseline Funding		£5,390.4	£3,609.3	£5,713.1	£3,692.1	£6,100.9	£3,766.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>£5,906.1</b>	<b>£6,229.0</b>	<b>£6,742.6</b>	<b>£6,551.7</b>	<b>£7,469.5</b>	<b>£6,939.6</b>	<b>£8,180.4</b>
Reduction for FF2 consultation changes		(£500.0)	£0.0	(£500.0)		(£500.0)	
<b>Reduction for NNDR losses</b>		(£160.0)	£0.0	(£160.0)		£0.0	
<b>Total excluding grants</b>	<b>£5,906.1</b>	<b>£5,569.0</b>	<b>£6,742.6</b>	<b>£5,891.7</b>	<b>£7,469.5</b>	<b>£6,439.6</b>	<b>£8,180.4</b>
<b>Increase from MTFS assumptions</b>			<b>£1,173.6</b>		<b>£1,577.8</b>		<b>£1,740.9</b>

4.1.11 Clarification from MHCLG has confirmed that the finance settlement also includes the funding relating to the legislated introduction of new separate food waste collection which SBC estimates will cost £554,790 (as set out in paragraph 4.2.1). However, any Government funding amount for this has not been identified separately. Notwithstanding, 2026/27 funding for Stevenage has increased in excess of the cost of food waste compared to 2025/26 amounts.

4.1.12 The settlement also now includes bigger, combined grants that replace several smaller ones, helping them focus more on delivering services than on managing payments. These grants will have their own rules for how money is



shared, and some will use old methods while others will use new, single formulas, the grants now included are summarised below. The reduction in homeless grant between 2025/26 and 2026/27 relates to the transfer of the temporary accommodation element into Revenue Support Grant (RSG) as shown in paragraph 4.1.10 and is from 2026/27, part of the Council's general government funding.

Grants				
Funding:	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
DHP/Crisis resilience fund	£ 141,830	£ 163,433	£ 163,433	0
Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)	£1,078,000	£ 1,226,580	TBC	TBC
Homeless grant	£1,623,414	£1,057,303	£1,088,177	£1,125,762
Domestic abuse grant	£ 37,663	£37,663	£37,663	£37,663
<b>Total</b>	<b>£2,880,907</b>	<b>£2,484,979</b>	<b>£1,289,273</b>	<b>£1,163,425</b>

4.1.13 Included above is the 2026/27 allocation for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) which increased from 2025/26 and is ringfenced for improving recycling and waste collection. The recommended use of the grant will be set out in the February Draft Budget report but £500,000 of the allocation has been recommended to purchase two new freighters out of the three required in 2026/27 to help fund the capital growth need for next year (in addition to that set out in paragraph 4.2.5) and is included in the Draft Capital Strategy on this agenda.

4.1.14 The new grant funding in the Fair Funding Settlement, sits alongside an assumption of a 3% core council tax referendum principle and a 2% adult social care precept, which will result in an average overall real terms increase in local authority core spending power of 2.6% per year between 2025/26 and 2028/29.

4.1.15 The business rates safety net for 2026/27 is 100% rather than Council's funding the first 7.5% of losses as in previous years, this is detailed further in paragraph 4.4.3.

## 4.2 Pressures Projected in the General Fund 2026/27-2028/29

4.2.1 The General Fund budget assumptions for 2026/27 now include net growth pressures of £3.6Million as set out below which are included in section 4.7 of this report.



Pressures	2025/26 MTFS	2026/27	+/-	Comments
Inflation	£1,045,492	£1,561,767	£516,275	Inflation has increased from that estimated in the September MTFS and includes: higher (1) Pay costs by £209K as the pay award assumptions have been increased from 2.75% to 3.25% based on current higher inflation. (2) Utility costs increase by £60K as a result of higher standing charges. (3) higher costs from third parties and shared services (£149K)
Employer pension contributions	£100,000	(£1,327,540)	(£1,427,540)	The Council was notified in November 2025 that the employer's rate would reduce from 19.3% to 16.5% and in addition no fixed payment of £1.5Million covering the HRA and General Fund. The Pension Fund is 112% funded, hence the significant decrease in costs. This has also led to a reduction in shared service costs provided to other LA's. For note the final confirmation has yet to be received.
Housing Benefit net costs	£10,000	£75,954	£65,954	With the transfer to Universal Credit the level of bad debt provision has increased for housing benefit overpayments as well as the assumed reduction in housing admin subsidy.
LEP loans repayment reserve	£0	£500,000	£500,000	see paragraph 4.2.2-4.2.3.
Local Government Reform (LGR)	£150,000	£560,000	£410,000	see paragraph 4.2.4.
Revenue Contribution to Capital	£700,000	£1,200,000	£500,000	see paragraph 4.2.5-4.2.7



Pressures	2025/26 MTFS	2026/27	+/-	Comments
Queensway LLP	£250,000	£250,000	£0	The Council set up the LLP to act as a catalyst for regeneration in the town centre. In order to ensure that funding to invest in the asset and/or support the LLP over the 37 year lease, the CFO recommended increased contributions be set aside as set out in the BTB November 2025 report.
Apprentice Scheme	£150,000	£150,000	£0	Members approved as part of the September MTFS to fund the apprentice programme previously assumed to be met from year end underspends
External support for the new Forster Country park	£20,000	£20,000	£0	Members approved as part of the September MTFS a contribution to support the implementation of the Forster Country Park
Maintenance (including lifts)	£0	£50,000	£50,000	The Council has incurred additional costs relating to in particular the Railway MSCP and Railway lift during 2024-2025. The increase in budget will ensure works are completed in a timely manner.
On-going costs related to PCI compliance (Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS))	£0	£54,000	£54,000	The Council is implementing a system to support compliance for payments made to the Council, the current projections for annual fees is recommended to be included in the budget
Separate Food Waste	£0	£554,790	£554,790	The MTFS had assumed this would be funded from an allocation within the funding settlement, however it has not identified separately (see para.4.1.11)
<b>Total Identified</b>	<b>£2,425,492</b>	<b>£3,648,971</b>	<b>£ 1,223,479</b>	

4.2.2 The 2026/27 identified pressures of £3.6Million include a £500K recommended transfer to an earmarked reserve for repayment of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) in 2029/30 of £6.5Million. The loans were granted for acquisition of assets to facilitate the Council's SG1 regeneration



programme and a scheduled set aside of monies to repay the LEP loans are summarised in the table below and are included in the revised MTFS projections in section 4.11. A significant part of the remainder of the LEP loan balance has been recommended to be ringfenced in the NNDR earmarked reserve as set out in paragraphs 4.11.4-4.11.5, leaving £500K to be identified in the period 2026/27-2029/30.

	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	Total
LEP loan set aside	£500,000	£1,000,000	£1,300,000	£1,300,000	£4,100,000
Still to be identified					£2,400,000
<b>Total Loans to be repaid 2029/30</b>					<b>£6,500,000</b>

4.2.3 The alternative option to the LEP loan reserve would have been to ringfence more business rate gains however, with the changes to business rates as set out in section 4.4, the likelihood is these will be significantly lower than experienced in previous years.

4.2.4 Also included in the 2026/27 £6.3Million pressures is an additional cost of £560,000 for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) transition expenditure which the government anticipates Councils will meet from reserves and LGR savings. The CFO recommends setting aside the following amounts which will be reviewed following any future announcements on the LGR timetable. District Councils in Hertfordshire have suggested a minimum amount of circa £1Million.

	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Total
LGR funding	£560,000	£500,000	£400,000	£1,460,000

4.2.5 The November 2025 Balancing the Budget report recommended that the identified 2026/27 in year surplus of £706K should be utilised to support the General Fund Capital Strategy as the investment in the Council's assets has been severely restricted to fix on fail due to a shortage of capital resources. The Draft Capital Strategy to this Cabinet meeting includes a larger increase due to the improvement in the General Fund financial position and the contributions to capital recommended are summarised below.

Capital Funding (Revenue)	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	Total
Additional funding for capital	£1,200,000	£1,200,000	£1,200,000	£1,000,000	£4,600,000
Growth Bids not funded	£175,000	£621,700	£140,500	£669,400	£1,606,600

4.2.6 In addition to the use of revenue for capital investment in 2026/27 an amount of £250,000 is recommended to be transferred to the capital earmarked reserve (based on the in-year surplus set out in section 4.8) to given additional financial resilience to the Capital Strategy in the event that projected receipts



are delayed. This measure would be in addition to the deferred works reserve of £400,000.

- 4.2.7 However, Members should note that even with the additional resources set out above there are still a number of capital bids not funded and the stock condition survey included in the proposed 2026/27 programme may identify further works required to the Council's community, operational and leisure buildings once completed.

### 4.3 Council Tax and Council Tax Support

- 4.3.1 The December 2025 Cabinet Council Tax base report showed a 2026/27 increase in the tax base of 1.09 % compared to 2025/26, (2025/26 -0.3%). The growth in the taxbase assumed by the government was slightly lower in the Core Spending Power (CSP) with the government assuming £24,688 less council tax income than Stevenage is projecting for 2026/27. In terms of the increase in Band D property the finance settlement assumes a 2.99% increase for Districts plus a further 2% for social care for unitary and upper tier Councils with £15 increase on a Band D for the PCC.
- 4.3.2 The November 2025 Cabinet BTB report recommended a 2.99% increase in council tax and the CFO recommends increasing council tax by 2.99%, a below inflation increase with SBC element of the bill forming only 10.8% of the overall council tax bill for Stevenage residents.
- 4.3.3 Members will recall that SBC retains the lowest share of the overall Council Tax raised each year. To illustrate this, taking a Band C property, (which is the biggest proportion of properties in Stevenage) the relative shares of council tax for a band C property are shown below.

Authority	2024/25	2025/26	Cost per week	Increase	Share
Hertfordshire County Council	£1,498.45	£1,573.22	£30.25	4.99%	77.58%
Stevenage Borough Council	£212.68	£219.03	£4.21	2.99%	10.80%
Police Crime Commissioner	£223.11	£235.56	£4.53	5.58%	11.62%
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,934.24</b>	<b>£2,027.81</b>	<b>£39.00</b>	<b>4.84%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

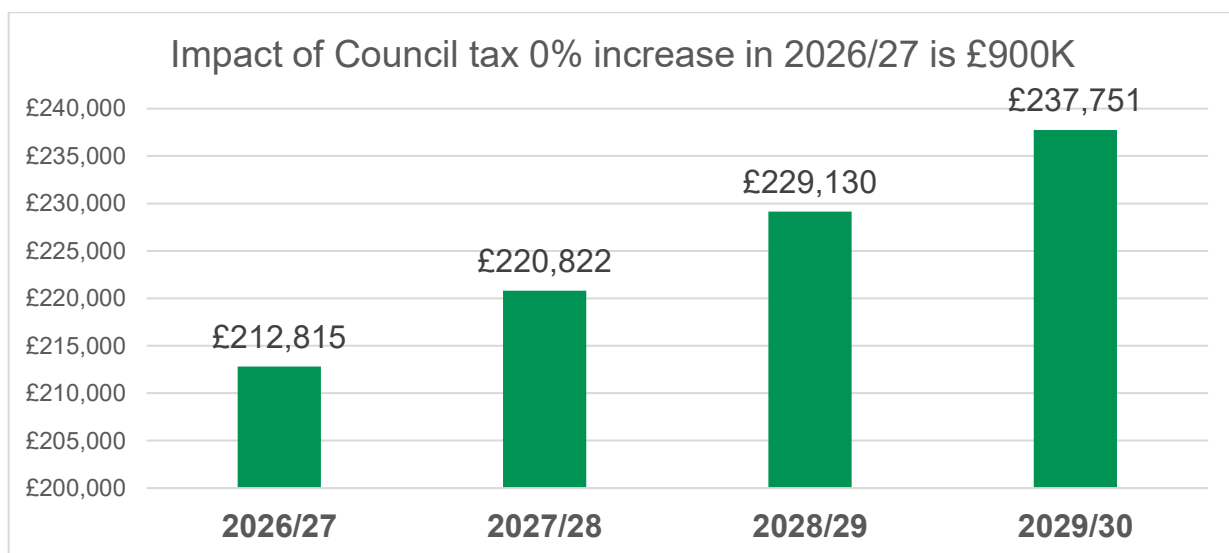
- 4.3.4 An estimate of the 2.99% increase in council tax for Stevenage Borough Council is summarised in the table below.

Council tax band	2025/26 SBC	2.99% incr. per year	2026/27	Incr. per week
A	£164.27	£4.91	£169.18	£0.09



Council tax band	2025/26 SBC	2.99% incr. per year	2026/27	Incr. per week
B	£191.65	£5.73	£197.38	£0.11
C	<b>£219.03</b>	£6.55	£225.58	£0.13
D	£246.41	£7.37	£253.78	£0.14
E	£301.17	£9.00	£310.17	£0.17
F	£355.93	£10.64	£366.57	£0.20
G	£410.68	£12.28	£422.96	£0.24
H	£492.82	£14.74	£507.56	£0.28

- 4.3.5 The impact of a council tax increase versus no 2026/27 increase during the General Fund medium Term is set out in the chart below and shows that over the period 2026/27-2029/30 this equates to an estimated loss of resources of £900,519.



### Council Tax Support

- 4.3.6 A local CTS scheme cannot be revised for at least one financial year. Billing Authorities (such as SBC) must consider whether to revise or replace their scheme with another on an annual basis.
- 4.3.7 Any revision to a scheme must be made by the Council by the 11 March, immediately preceding the financial year in which it is to take effect and will require consultation with those affected. Additionally, consideration should be given to providing transitional protection where the support is to be reduced or removed.
- 4.3.8 The Council must, in the following order, consult with major precepting authorities, (i.e. Hertfordshire County Council and Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Hertfordshire), publish a draft scheme in such manner as it thinks fit, and consult such other persons as it considers are likely



to have an interest in the operation of the scheme. The CFO wrote to both precepting authorities regarding the proposal for 2026/27.

- 4.3.9 The current **working age** scheme requires those on maximum benefits only to pay 8.5% of their council tax bill for the year. This equated to £172.36 for a Band C council home in 2025/26 on the total bill (with an additional 25% discount for a single person) or £3.31 per week.
- 4.3.10 In November 2025 Members approved the retention of the existing scheme for next year (uprated to reflect benefit changes for 2026/27) and agreed that officers should look at a banded scheme for proposal to include engagement / consultation with residents subject to the Local government Reform timetable for Hertfordshire.

#### 4.4 Business Rates Income

- 4.4.1 The MTFs and draft General Fund budget only includes an assumption of the 2026/27 baseline funding for business rates, or the amount the government has assessed the Council needs under its funding formula. In previous years there has been an additional £200K gains in the General Fund (with the rest transferred to the NNDR gains earmark reserve), however with the complete reset of business rates for 2026/27 and a projected reduction in gains against the 2025/26 estimate (see paragraph 4.4.7) no gains are currently included for the period 2026/27-2029/30.
- 4.4.2 Alongside the reset a number of other changes are being made to business rates, there will be the introduction of up to three new multipliers, which could cause volatility in the projected rates councils collect. This coincides with a new revaluation coming into effect on 1 April 2026, using market values determined as of 1 April 2024. As announced at Autumn Budget 2024, in April 2026, the government will replace retail, hospitality and leisure relief with two lower business rates multipliers for properties with rateable values below £500,000. In addition, a new larger property multiplier will be introduced for properties with a rateable value over £500,000, which is intended to help fund the reduction in the RHL multipliers.

Multipliers from April 2026			
Category	Rateable Value (RV)	Multiplier	Notes
Small Business RHL*	Below £51,000	38.2p	New
Standard RHL*	£51,000 – £499,999	43.0p	New
Large (All Properties)	£500,000 and above	50.8p	New
Small Business (Non-RHL)	Below £51,000	43.2p	Existing
Standard (Non-RHL)	£51,000 – £499,999	48.0p	Existing

*\*Retail hospitality and Leisure*

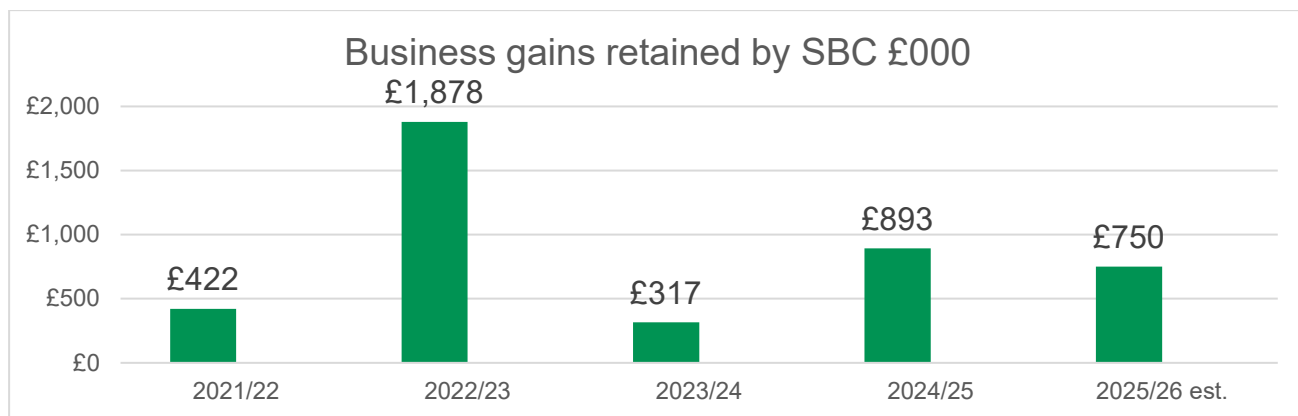


- 4.4.3 The government has recommended changes to the safety net and transitional arrangements which are intended to help councils manage the financial impact of all the impacts summarised above. In previous years the first 7.5% of losses were funded by Councils before the safety net applied. For 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29 the safety net starts at 100%, 95% and 97.5% for the respective years.
- 4.4.4 Business rate gains above the £200K assumed in the budget have been used transferred to the NNDR reserve to fund time limited growth and regeneration objectives. The rules governing NDR accounting mean any estimated gains are taken in year and any difference between the actual and the estimate are taken from or, in the case of losses refunded to, the Collection Fund in future years.
- 4.4.5 The actual level of business rates that the Council keeps each year is determined once the NDR1 form issued by the government is completed. This calculates business rates collectable, level of reliefs to be given in 2026/27 and S31 grants due.
- 4.4.6 In order to complete the NNDR1 and incorporate the system changes for the new multipliers, the year-end release needs to be applied which means that a first draft will not be completed in time to meet the governments deadline of 31 January 2026. The November BTB report recommended this be delegated to the CFO after consultation with the Resources & Performance Portfolio Holder.
- 4.4.7 The 2025/26 business rates will be reviewed as part of the NNDR1 activity. Based on the current projections 2025/26 business rate income is lower as summarised below and this estimate is included in the revised budgets for 2025/26 and 2026/27.

	Original NNDR	Revised NNDR	2025/26 impact	2026/27 impact
Business Rates	(£22,824,068)	(£22,287,351)		£536,717
Tariff	£19,488,317	£19,488,317		
S31 Grants	(£2,210,373)	(£2,185,159)	£25,214	
Levy	£927,339	£651,082	(£276,256)	
Retained Business Rates	(£4,618,785)	(£4,333,110)	(£251,042)	£536,717
Reduction in Business Rates				£285,675

- 4.4.8 Business rate gains do fluctuate between financial years as shown below and with the business rate reset (see also paragraph 4.4.1) no gains are currently being projected going forward.

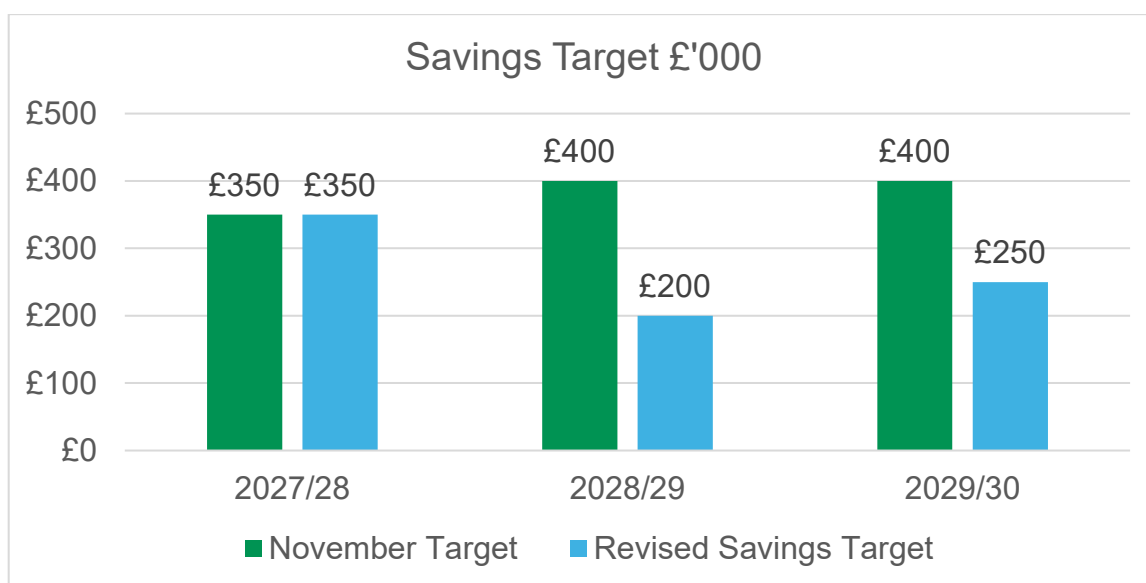




*Note: A Pilot operated in Hertfordshire in 2022/23 where 75% of gains were retained in Hertfordshire*

#### 4.5 The Balancing the Budget Savings Target

- 4.5.1 As set out in paragraph 3.7 the 2027/28-2029/30 savings shortfall of £1.15Million could now be addressed through annual fees and charges increases if costs and income remain in line with the updated MTFS projections. The target has been updated based on the financial information included in this report and is now projected to be £800K as summarised below.



- 4.5.2 The BTB report to the November 2025 Cabinet report included the recommended/approved budget reductions/income increases, which are summarised and did not contain any service cuts.

Balancing the Budget Savings Summary	Approved	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
MTFS efficiency savings	September 2025 Cabinet	£766,606	£839,616	£843,364



Fees & charges	October 2025 Cabinet	£309,000	£314,000	£314,000
Taxi Licences	October 2025 Cabinet	£33,000	£60,000	£60,000
Commercial Option Primett Road	October 2025 Cabinet	(£22,500)	£100,000	£100,000
Star Chamber Options (App A)	November 2025 Cabinet	£84,640	£105,970	£132,370
Changes to Leisure Contract	December 2025 Cabinet	£110,000	£110,000	£110,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>£1,280,746</b>	<b>£1,529,586</b>	<b>£1,559,734</b>

#### 4.6 Growth Options

- 4.6.1 The September 2025 MTFS assumed growth of £75K for 2026/27 there are a small number of proposed growth bids which include a one off bid of £50K for the Towns 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary programme in 2026/27 and on-going growth bids of £95,140 and are summarised in Appendix B.
- 4.6.2 Included in the growth bids is a monies for events. Members should note that initially event island had a proportion of Towns Fund revenue monies to fund events, if the programme as outlined in Appendix B is to continue a growth bid is required.
- 4.6.3 The growth bids are in excess of the £75K growth target, however savings identified are higher than in the September MTFS and General Fund balances are significantly above the minimum level required and they are all therefore recommended.
- 4.6.4 The November 2025 BTB report recommended that once the Finance settlement was published there could be further scope to include growth in the 2026/27 General Fund budget and in particular reporting the significant shortfall in capital resources and as set out in paragraph 4.2.5-4.2.6.
- 4.6.5 Consideration of any further additional growth should take into account the medium-term financial position and the inflation and pressures identified within this report. Section 4.9 considers this in more detail.

#### 4.7 Changes to the 2026/27 General Fund budget versus the 2025/26 Original General Fund Budget

- 4.7.1 The General Fund budget is now projected to be £12,986,060 (with a contribution to balances of £601,581), versus the November BTB report projection of £11,589,874 (and a draw on balances of £706,396) which didn't include any contribution to capital (recommended in the report). General Fund net expenditure is higher versus BTB report notwithstanding the £1.2Million contribution to capital and as set out in paragraph 4.1.10 core resources have increased too. The changes are set out below.

BTB report to Draft General Fund Budget	£	Comments
Balancing the Budget	£11,589,870	
Impacts from 2025/26 :		



BTB report to Draft General Fund Budget	£	Comments
Slippage of revenue contribution to capital from 2025/26	£163,500	see para. 4.8.1
Total 2025/26 Changes	<b>£163,500</b>	
<b>Inflation :</b>		
Inflation 2026/27	£529,500	see para 4.1.1
Employer pension contributions	(£1,427,540)	see para 4.1.1
<b>Pressures:</b>		
Housing Benefit net costs	£80,580	With the transfer to Universal Credit the level of bad debt provision has increased for housing benefit overpayments as well as the assumed reduction in housing admin subsidy.
Maintenance (including lifts)	£50,000	see para 4.1.1
On-going costs related to PCI compliance (Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS))	£54,000	see para 4.1.1
<b>Government Reforms:</b>		
Local Government Reform (LGR)	£410,000	The BTB & MTFs report included £150K for LGR transition costs, however discussions within Hertfordshire LA's a figure of £1Million which has been profiled over 2026/27-2027/28 for SBC.
Separate Food Waste Costs	£554,790	The cost of new separate food waste was anticipated to be funded through new burdens see also para. 4.1.11.
Extended Producer Responsibility grant	(£1,226,580)	The second year of the funding for EPR announced in November 2025 (see also para. 4.1.4)
Recycling & waste related spend (EPR)	£726,580	see para. 4.1.4
New Revenue Contribution to Capital (EPR)	£500,000	see para. 4.1.4
<b>Funding Capital and repaying debt:</b>		
New Revenue Contribution to Capital	£1,200,000	The BTB report recommended the use of surpluses to fund capital which has been restricted for a number of years (see also para. 4.2.5-4.2.6)
LEP loans repayment reserve	£500,000	see paragraph 4.2.2-4.2.3.
<b>Investment Income</b>		
Investment income	(£184,410)	The General Fund balances are projected to be higher for 2026/27, however there is an increase in internal borrowing



BTB report to Draft General Fund Budget	£	Comments
		estimated for 2027/28 which reduces the projected investment interest due.
<b>Savings Changes:</b>		
Savings recommended	£8,060	This includes a £5K reduction of parking income in the Old Town while the Active Travel highways improvements are underway approved by Members in the November 2025 Cabinet meeting.
<b>Changes to NNDR gains:</b>		
Transfer from reserves NNDR	(£536,710)	The 2025/26 projected losses need to be repaid to the Collection Fund in 2026/27 and the equivalent amount has been transferred from the NNDR reserve
<b>Minor changes:</b>		
Minor movements	(£5,580)	
<b>Total Identified</b>	<b>£1,232,690</b>	
<b>Draft General Fund budget 2026/27</b>	<b>£12,986,060</b>	

- 4.7.2 A summary of the General Fund core resources are summarised in the table below. Funding has increased but is partly offset by the inclusion of the new food waste service of £554K not funded separately (and shown in net General Fund expenditure).

Core resources	BTB Assumptions	Draft Budget	BTB V Provisional Variance
Business Rates	(£3,470,303)	(£3,609,322)	(£139,018)
Revenue Support Grant	(£1,420,051)	(£2,849,486)	(£1,429,434)
Recovery grant	(£283,819)	(£283,819)	£0
Business rate losses	£160,000	£0	(£160,000)
<b>Total</b>	<b>(£5,014,174)</b>	<b>(£6,742,626)</b>	<b>(£1,728,452)</b>
Council Tax	(£7,305,404)	(£7,330,379)	(£24,975)
Transfers to Collection Fund NNDR	£183,637	£720,354	£536,717
Transfers from Collection Fund Ctax	(£160,330)	(£234,991)	(£74,660)
<b>Total Collection Fund changes</b>	<b>(£7,282,096)</b>	<b>(£6,845,015)</b>	<b>£437,081</b>
<b>Total Funding</b>	<b>(£12,296,270)</b>	<b>(£13,587,641)</b>	<b>(£1,291,371)</b>
<b>Use of Balances</b>	<b>(£706,396)</b>	<b>(£601,581)</b>	<b>£104,815</b>



## 4.8 2025/26 Budget changes

4.8.1 The 2025/26 General Fund budget is projected to decrease by £509,450. A summary of the changes is detailed below.

Changes to the 2025/26 Budget			
<b>General Fund quarter 2 budget</b>		<b>£10,726,470</b>	
<b>Lower costs:</b>			
Business rates	(£454,690)		The Council has submitted a number of business rates appeals as a result of the 2023 rating list. This is backdated to 2023 and relates to the St Georges MSCP.
Housing Benefit costs	(£69,010)	(£523,700)	
<b>Slippage:</b>			
Revenue Contribution to Capital	(£163,500)	(£163,500)	The Draft Capital Strategy identifies slippage including for the garages programme
<b>Changes in Reserves:</b>			
Transfer to NNDR Reserve	£251,220		Core resources have reduced as a result of lower business rate gains from a lower levy on business gains (£366K) offset by lower S31 grants (£188K). All gains above £200K are transferred to the NNDR reserve (see para. 4.4.7)
Transfer to Capital Reserve	£250,000	£501,220	Paragraph 4.25-4.27
<b>Total Changes</b>		<b>(£185,980)</b>	
<b>Revised General Fund budget</b>		<b>£10,540,490</b>	

## 4.9 Proposed Additional Growth

4.9.1 The General Fund projected in year surpluses and balances as a result of the expenditure, income and core resource impacts set out in sections 4.4-4.8 are summarised below.

General Fund Balances	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
In year surplus	£530,373	£601,582	(£51,884)	£107,070	(£24,085)
Year end balances	£7,591,735	£8,193,317	£8,141,434	£8,248,504	£8,224,419



(red = deficit)

- 4.9.2 The combination of the additional funding (see paragraph 4.1.9) and reduction in employer pension contributions impact is offset in future years and for 2027/28 by:
1. The increase in LEP loan set aside (see paragraph 4.2.2) from £500K to £1Million
  2. The reduction in the required 2027/28 £350K savings target versus the 2026/27 savings of £1.283Million (see also paragraph 4.5.2).
  3. A reduction in investment interest of £284K due to temporary internal borrowing which is repaid by the 2028/29.
  4. Assumption that there will be business rate losses of 5% (to the safety net of 95%) in 2027/28. The gains projected for 2025/26 (on which the fair funding settlement was based) are lower than the original estimate (see para.4.4.7)
- 4.9.3 Although the General Fund balances are higher than in previous years and are above minimum balances, if on-going growth bids are approved this mean the need to increase future savings targets or risk building a structural deficit that could grow over time and be difficult to eliminate without significant savings. Therefore, the CFO recommends that any growth items are one off in nature or time limited so that the savings target is not beyond 2026/27 as the Council transitions into a new Unitary authority potentially from 2028/29.
- 4.9.4 In addition there are still risks around the level of required transition costs into LGR and there is still further LEP loan repayments to be identified, (potentially requiring savings).
- 4.9.5 Due to the timing of the funding settlement (17 December 2025) there has been insufficient time to fully develop one off spend initiatives for approval by the Cabinet portfolio holders, however a number of themes have emerged which are:
- **Supporting our residents** through additional Discretionary housing payments and S13a Council tax support exceptional circumstances to keep residents in their homes
  - **Supporting residents into work** through training interventions including for those of working age
  - **Improving our town** by complementing the proposed draft capital programme with additional spend to complete hedge 'hair cuts' -
  - **Increasing the financial support Councillors can give** through increasing the Local Community Budget that Members can award to groups and charities in their ward and in particular during the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the town.
- 4.9.6 The CFO recommends that up to £600K of additional one off spend could be included in the 2026/27 budget for these purposes and if approved in principle for inclusion the February General Fund Draft budget report will contain options for approval.



- 4.9.7 Subject to the General Fund projections being realisation as set out above there could be potentially further scope in 2026/27- 2027/28 to approve further one-off growth.
- 4.9.8 The impact of approving **2026/27 on-going growth of £600K** soon builds in a structural deficit as shown below which by 2027/28 is £651K and would require an increase in the savings target of circa that amount.

General Fund Balances	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
In year surplus	£530,373	£1,582	(£651,884)	(£492,930)	(£624,085)
Year end balances	£7,591,735	£7,593,317	£6,941,434	£6,448,504	£5,824,419

#### 4.10 Level of Balances required for General Fund and projected balances

- 4.10.1 The September 2025 MTFS assumed that the minimum level of balances required would be £3.57Million. A full assessment has been carried out which is detailed in Appendix C and, accordingly, the minimum level of balances now totals £3,648,355. The projected General Fund balances even with one off growth are higher than the revised amount for 2026/27, but paragraph 4.9.8 demonstrates the negative impact on balances on-going spend could have furthermore, the cost of LGR transition is not clear at this stage and this will need to be kept under review alongside the other risks set out in this report.
- 4.10.2 The projected General Fund balances and council tax requirement are set out below (including 2026/27 £600K one off growth) and the level of projected General Fund balances are as set out in paragraph 4.11.1.

General Fund Budget	2025/26 Estimate	2025/26 Projected	2026/27 Estimate
Net Expenditure	£10,753,540	£10,540,490	£13,586,060
Use of/ (Contribution) to Balances	(£2,834,102)	(£530,369)	(£1,581)
<b>Budget Requirement</b>	<b>£7,919,437</b>	<b>£10,010,121</b>	<b>£13,584,479</b>
Revenue Support Grant	(£149,048)	(£149,048)	(£2,849,486)
Recovery grant	(£283,819)	(£283,819)	(£283,819)
New Homes Bonus	(£97,000)	(£97,000)	£0
Backstop grant (Audit)	£0	(£60,044)	£0
Total grant support	<b>(£529,867)</b>	<b>(£589,911)</b>	<b>(£3,133,305)</b>
Business Rates net of tariff and levy	(£2,408,412)	(£2,684,669)	(£3,609,322)
S31 grants NNDR	(£2,210,192)	(£2,185,159)	
Total in year business rates	<b>(£4,618,604)</b>	<b>(£4,869,828)</b>	<b>(£3,609,322)</b>
(Return) /Contribution to Collection Fund (NDR) re 2023/43 & 2024/25 & 2025/26	£1,232,757	£1,232,757	£720,354
Collection Fund Surplus (ctax)	£196,632	£196,632	(£234,991)



General Fund Budget	2025/26 Estimate	2025/26 Projected	2026/27 Estimate
Council Tax Requirement	(£7,040,510)	(£7,040,510)	(£7,330,379)
Council Tax Base	£28,572	£28,572	£28,885
Council Tax Band D	£246.41	£246.41	£253.78
Council Tax Band C	£219.04	£219.04	£225.58

#### 4.11 Medium Term Financial Strategy General Fund Summary

4.11.1 The MTFs modelling has been updated to reflect the contents of this report including the assumption about one off growth in 2026/27 of £600K as set out in section 4.9.

General Fund Balances	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
In year surplus	£530,373	£1,582	(£51,884)	£107,070	(£24,085)
Year end balances	£7,591,735	£7,593,317	£7,541,433	£7,648,503	£7,624,418

4.11.2 Adding the additional £600K one off growth means the General Fund has a small surplus of £1,581 in 2026/27. Although the funding position is much better for SBC there are still risks to setting a balanced budget going forward which are:

- Business rates do not recover to the base level assumed by the Government and there is an on-going loss of business rates before the safety levy is payable increase net costs to the General Fund of higher than £160K beyond 2028/29 (there are no losses assumed in the MTFs after 2028/29)
- LGR transition costs are higher than estimated and there is an expectation that Councils will fund this themselves and all of the proposed Unitary models required savings to be realised.
- The General Fund Capital Strategy has a future funding shortfalls despite the £1.2Million funding recommended in the Capital Strategy and further capital requirements may be identified as a result of the stock condition survey commissioned for 2026/27 (growth bid).
- Inflation increases which results in the need for higher BTB savings targets to be set.

4.11.3 In addition to the risk assessment of balances to support the General Fund's financial resilience, there are two further allocated reserves available which are summarised below. The CFO recommends they are retained at the projected levels in case they are needed to support the General Fund in year.

Reserves £'000	Closing 2024/25	(Use)/to	Closing 2025/26	(Use)/to	Closing 2026/27	(Use)/to	Closing 2027/28
Gains (NNDR)	£4,580	(£1,022)	£3,558	(£1,077)	£2,481	£1,442	£3,923
Income equalisation Reserve	£758	(£200)	£558	£0	£558	£0	£558



Reserves £'000	Closing 2024/25	(Use)/to	Closing 2025/26	(Use)/to	Closing 2026/27	(Use)/to	Closing 2027/28
<b>Total Available to support the GF</b>	£5,338	(£1,222)	£4,116	(£1,077)	£3,039	£1,442	£4,481

4.11.4 The closing balance for the NNDR reserve as at 31 March 2028 is £3.9Million and that includes assumptions about realised and unrealised NNDR and net interest rate earned on the Council's joint venture with Mace at Claxton House. This is summarised below.

<b>NNDR Reserve</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
<b>Opening Balance 2025/26</b>		<b>(£4,580,127)</b>
Gains not realised	£1,667,434	£0
Graduate scheme spend	£757,940	£2,425,374
<b>Net Gains still to be achieved</b>	<b>£</b>	
Remaining gains to be realised 2025/26	(£753,903)	£0
Claxton House	(£1,014,434)	(£1,768,338)
<b>Closing Balance 2027/28</b>		<b>(£3,923,092)</b>

4.11.5 The CFO recommends that the £2Million of the reserve's balances are used to contribute to the remaining outstanding LEP loans as set out in paragraph 4.2.2.

4.11.6 The General Fund reserves allocated for specific purposes are summarised below.

Reserves £'000	Closing 2024/25	Use	Closing 2025/26	Use	Closing 2026/27	Closing 2027/28
NHB reserve <i>note 1</i>	£10	£0	£10	£0	£10	£10
Business Change & Digital Reserve <i>note 2</i>	£773	£314	£1,087	£0	£1,087	£1,087
Homeless reserve <i>note 3</i>	£420	£109	£529	(£96)	£434	£434
Planning Delivery <i>note 4</i>	£198	(£95)	£103	£0	£103	£103
Queensway monies <i>note 5</i>	£215	£193	£408	£293	£701	£1,094
Regeneration Reserve <i>note 7</i>	£245	(£107)	£139	£0	£139	£139
Town Centre Reserve	£0	£56	£56	£0	£56	£56
Town square reserve <i>note 6</i>	£1,711	£55	£1,766	(£35)	£1,731	£1,546
Insurance reserve <i>note 8</i>	£62	£0	£62	£0	£62	£62
ICT reserve <i>note 9</i>	£142	£0	£142	£0	£142	£142
New Leisure <i>note 15</i>	£219	(£219)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Stevenage works <i>note 11</i>	£20	(£20)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Asylum seekers reserve <i>note 12</i>	£1,018	(£227)	£790	(£518)	£272	£272
Future Councils reserve <i>note 10</i>	£198	(£198)	£0	£0	£0	£0
Commercial Property repair reserve <i>note 13</i>	£41	£0	£41	£0	£41	£41



Reserves £'000	Closing 2024/25	Use	Closing 2025/26	Use	Closing 2026/27	Closing 2027/28
Domestic abuse reserve	£196	£0	£196	£0	£196	£196
Extended Producer Pays grant note 14	£0	£218	£218	£0	£218	£218
Elections Reserve	£0	£50	£50	(£50)	£0	£0
LEP Loan Reserve see para. 4.2.2	£0	£0	£0	£500	£500	£1,500
Apprentice Reserve	£150	£150	£300	£150	£450	£600
<b>Total Allocated for use</b>	<b>£5,617</b>	<b>£280</b>	<b>£5,896</b>	<b>£243</b>	<b>£6,140</b>	<b>£7,498</b>

4.11.7 There is a planned transfer to balances of £280K and £243K in 2025/26 and 2026/27 respectively. The established reserves are as follows:

1. NHB reserve was created to hold NHB allocations so that the General Fund did not become reliant on the funding. This reserve has reduced from its peak of £1.6Million to £10K in 2025/26.
2. Business Change & Digital Reserve is used to hold the monies set out for the Council's Business Change programme including improving the Council's digital offer and streamlining processes to give better outcomes and improved service delivery for residents. When business cases are established monies will be drawn down from the reserve.
3. These are ringfenced government Homeless grants which are used to support the Council's homeless function including additional staff resources. The 2026/27 allocation has been assumed to be spent in year.
4. Planning Delivery is required to support the surveys for the Local Plan and is used over and above any General Fund allocation.
5. Queensway Car Park Monies - this is the income from the Queensway Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) for parking income and the allowance for future costs for the LLP as agreed in the September 2024 and 2025 MTFS. This money has been ringfenced to support the fit out of future commercial tenancies on Queensway North.
6. Town Square Reserve - the monies are held to support the running costs of assets acquired for regeneration purposes.
7. The Regeneration reserve is used to fund one off additional costs incurred by the Regeneration Team to support the teams projects including professional and legal advice.
8. The Insurance reserve is used to support adhoc preventative works to reduce potential future claims where no core budget is in place.
9. The ICT reserve is ICT Reserve - this was used to absorb pressures in year.
10. The Future Councils Reserve is used to ringfence the £750K grant funding received by the government, which is predicted to be spent by 31 March 2026.
11. Stevenage Works is the flagship job and training hub / partnership which comprises SBC, North Herts College and Job Centre Plus. The funding in the reserve has yet to be forecast and an update will be included in the February report.
12. These are ringfenced Asylum grants which are used to support the Council's homeless function including the provision of additional staff resources.



13. The Commercial Property Reserve is a reactive pot which can be used to support works to the commercial estate if expenditure is above the in-year budget allocation.
14. The Extended Producer Pays reserve see para. 4.1.3

#### **4.12 Chief Finance Officer's Commentary**

- 4.12.1 The Chief Finance Officer is the Council's principal financial advisor and has statutory responsibilities in relation to the administration of the Council's financial affairs (Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 and Section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988). This commentary is given in light of these statutory responsibilities, (see also Appendix D).
- 4.12.2 The Council has evolved its budget strategy to meet multiple challenges as set out in this report and the financial strategy to deal with this is the 'Balancing the Budget' priority of 'Stevenage Even Better' Corporate Plan.
- 4.12.3 Officers regularly update the MTFS to ensure that a clear financial position for the Council can be demonstrated over the next five years. This medium-term view of the budget gives a mechanism by which future 'budget gaps' can be identified allowing for a measured rather than reactive approach to reducing net expenditure. Work is ongoing throughout the year to seek to bridge the BTB funding gap.
- 4.12.4 The Council has taken significant steps over recent years to balance its budget and the 2026/27-2028/29 Fair Funding Settlement has improved the financial position of the Council and given certainty about the next three years funding from Government. The 2027/28-2029/30 BTB savings target has significantly reduced from historic levels and totals £800K and should be funded through annual fees and charges increases. This is of course dependent on the realisation of projected inflationary pressures as set out in the MTFS.
- 4.12.5 Events such as COVID and the Cost of Living crises have increased financial risks to Councils which has seen spikes in inflation which have become baselined within the budget. The Council has however taken a number of financial resilience measures which seek to increase the resilience of the Council's position including:
  - A risk assessment of balances to ensure general reserves held take the increased risk from recessionary pressures into account.
  - Establishment of the income equalisation reserve (£558K by 31 March 2026) which can be returned to the General Fund if fees and charges are lower than projected.
  - Identification of a sufficient level of on-going BTB options to ensure the General Fund is above or at the minimum level of balances.
  - Introduction of a Business Change and Digital programme to deliver savings for both the General Fund and HRA and get the Council ready for LGR.



- Implementation of a Commercial and Insourcing Strategy which looks for opportunities to increase the Council's net income from new commercial options, ensuring fees and charges are set based on the cost of services and any insourcing opportunities.
- Setting aside monies in the Queensway reserve to ensure there is sufficient monies available to Queensway LLP for future investment and support.
- Setting aside monies to repay the LEP loans due to be repaid in 2029/30

4.12.6 The current projections of balances, the new Fair Funding and the measures the Council has taken to date as set in this report mean that the level of balances projected are above the minimum level and sufficient to set the 2026/27 budget. However, a structural deficit could soon open up (as demonstrated in paragraph 4.9.8) if growth is on-going rather than one off in nature.

4.12.7 Further commentary can be found in Appendix D to this report (Section 25 Statement including Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves) which Members are asked to approve.

#### **4.13 Contingency Sums**

4.13.1 Cabinet Members will recall that a Contingency Sum needs to be determined by the Council as part of the Budget and Policy Framework in order to avoid the need for Council to consider all supplementary estimates during the course of the year. This contingency sum constitutes an upper cumulative limit during the financial year within which the Cabinet can approve supplementary estimates, rather than forming part of the Council's Budget Requirement for the year. A sum of £500,000 is proposed for 2026/27 for general spend and remains unchanged from 2025/26.

4.13.2 In addition a further allowance of £500,000 is recommended specifically for Local Government reorganisation if funding required is needed in advance of the 2027/28 allowance or costs are higher than expected. This means the General Fund would still project cash balances above the minimum levels set out in the report.

#### **4.14 Consultation**

##### **Resident Survey (2025)**

4.14.1 The 2025/26 Residents survey (on this Cabinet agenda) shows that resident's preferences with regards to achieving budget savings are firstly to reduce costs through the provision of more online services. This was ranked the highest (out of five options in 2025, 2021 and 2017) with 46%. This first-rate ranking has increased from 2021 and supports the Digital Strategy (approved at the December Cabinet) as a method to reduce costs and improve efficiency / productivity.



Please tell us your order of preference for each of the following options by ordering them 1 to 5	2025 rank	2021 rank	1st
Reduce time and money spent on paperwork by interacting with more residents and customers online/modernising services	1	1	46%
Make money by selling more of our services to residents and customers	2	4	9%
Increase income from fees and chargeable services, to keep the council's element of Council Tax as low as possible	3	2	24%
Spend less by reducing or cutting the services that you tell us are not a priority	4	3	10%
Increase our element of Council Tax (for example from 51p per day to 55p per day)	5	5	7%

4.14.2 The 2025 residents' survey asked residents whether the council tax represented value for money. While strongly disagree has decreased (from 15% to 12%), overall 44% (was 52% in 2021) of residents agree it represents value for money, with an increase in the number neither agreeing or disagreeing. It should be noted that Stevenage's performance remains above the LGA benchmark (2024) of 36%. Stevenage Borough Council is also the billing authority but only accounts for 10.8% of the overall council tax. The 2025 data and prior year comparators are shown in the chart below.

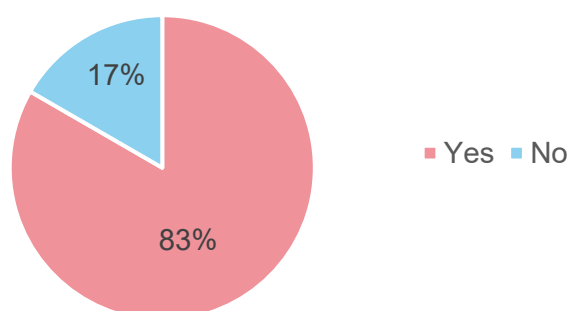
	Responses	2025	2021	2017	2015	2011
To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council Tax paid to Stevenage Borough Council provides good value for money?	Strongly agree	5%	16%	10%	7%	6%
	Tend to agree	39%	36%	36%	39%	40%
	Neither	28%	18%	30%	30%	33%
	Tend to disagree	13%	10%	17%	18%	16%
	Strongly disagree	12%	15%	7%	6%	5%
	Don't know (DNRO)	4%	4%			
	<b>Summary: Agree</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>46%</b>
	<b>Summary: Disagree</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>21%</b>

4.14.3 Development of the Councils 2024/25 Corporate Plan included a period of public and stakeholder engagement and consultation to include ascertaining if respondents:

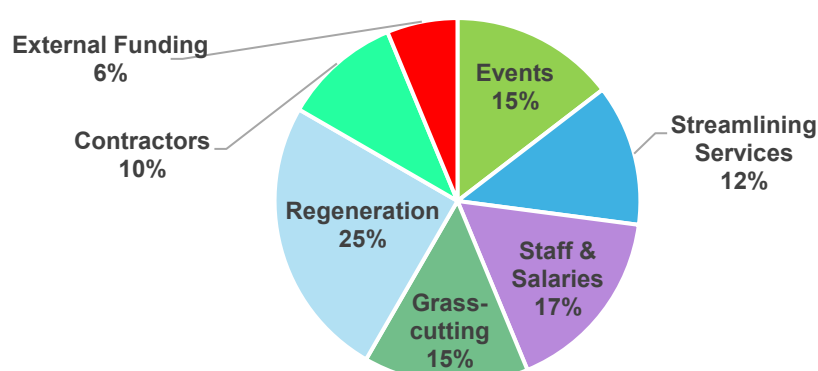
- Agree that Balancing the Budget should be a priority so that the Council can remain financially resilient and continue to deliver key services as set out in the Corporate Plan?
- If no, is the alternative is to reduce services and provide less?
- If yes, what should the Council stop doing to generate £1.23Million savings?



- 83% of respondents to the consultation agreed that Balancing the Budget should be a priority:



4.14.2 All survey respondents were asked for financial savings suggestions. The responses can be categorised into seven themes:



- The Transforming Our Town programme will attract new businesses to the area which would increase business rate revenue and car parking income (25%). – *The Council has opened a new Multi Storey car park and is working with partners to bring new business into the town, also improving the business rates collected and retained by the Council.*
- Reduce Staff and Councillor salaries (17%). – *The Council's Member allowances are reviewed and agreed by an Independent Remuneration Panel and staff pay is governed by the collective pay agreements as agreed with the unions.*
- The Council should consider selective grass-cutting allowing green spaces to grow wilder (within safe reasons) and reduce maintenance costs for grass cutting etc. (15%) – *The Council has already implemented this as a measure with an associated cost reduction.*
- Streamlining services (12%) – *The Council has a transformation programme which is targeted at streamlining processes and reducing costs.*
- Reduce use of Contractors (10%) – *The Council has a Commercial and Insourcing Strategy which includes reviewing contracts to see if they can be brought back in-house where deemed viable to do so at the point of re-tendering.*
- Reducing or cancelling events such as the November Fireworks Display, or those held on the Event Island and the Stevenage Museum. (15%) – *the*



*Council has been looking at how it manages and delivers future event activity with a view to driving out efficiencies where possible.*

- *Seeking external funding to plug the financial gap (6%). The Council has actively sought external funding and has received circa £80 Million of revenue and capital funding over the last few years.*

## **5 IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Financial Implications**

- 5.1.1 The report deals with Council finances and as such all implications are contained in the main body of the report.
- 5.1.2 Savings options are required to follow the Budget and Policy Framework as set out in this report. Fees and charges require a report to the Cabinet and were considered by the Cabinet in October 2025.

### **5.2 Legal Implications**

- 5.2.1 The Council is required to set a balanced budget each year. The Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires the Council to estimate revenue expenditure and income for the forthcoming year from all sources, together with contributions from reserves, in order to determine a net budget requirement to be met by government grant and council tax.

### **5.3 Policy Implications**

- 5.3.1 The report deals with Council policy and as such all implications are contained in the main body of the report.

### **5.4 Staffing and Accommodation Implications**

- 5.4.1 There is one savings option relating to the Customer Service Centre which reduces staff costs but the saving relates to posts that do not have permanent staff in.

### **5.5 Equal Opportunities Implications**

- 5.5.1 In carrying out or changing its functions (including those relating to the provision of services and the employment of staff) the Council must comply with the Equality Act 2010 and in particular section 149 which is the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Council has a statutory obligation to comply with the requirements of The Act, demonstrating that as part of the decision-making process, due regard has been given to the need to:
  - Remove discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that its unlawful under this Act



- Promote equal opportunities between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Encourage good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

5.5.2 These duties are non-delegable and must be considered by Council when setting the Budget in February 2026.

5.5.3 To inform the decisions about the Budget 2026/27 officers will produce an overarching EQIA for the budget will be produced to inform the decision taken by Council in February 2026. This is expected to have a positive impact as many of the savings are efficiency and do not involve service cuts together with the growth recommended.

## 5.6 Risk Implications

5.6.1 Risk implications have reduced since the last budget report in terms of funding as a result of the Fair Funding settlement and the reduction in employer pension contributions. But risks to setting a prudent General Fund budget still remain in the short and medium term particularly which includes the delivery of all the Balancing the Budget options identified in Appendix A and within the report

5.6.2 There are a number of risks that have been identified and these are set out in the report. The risks to the General Fund are summarised below.

Expenditure and Income	Impacted by	Risk (to increase cost)
<b>Inflation</b>	Although price increases around utilities and fuel have fallen, there is still huge volatility in the market with the continual war in Ukraine.	medium
	The MTFS assumes a 3.25% pay award for 2026/27, however previous years deals have been higher and the need for the pay grades to have due regard to inflation and the minimum wage may drive much higher pay negotiation outcomes. The 2027/28 pay award has been increased to 2.75% reflecting current higher levels of inflation from 2.5%.	medium
	The MTFS assumes a reduction in CPI inflation during the MTFS which has to be delivered to keep costs in line with projections.	high
<b>Demand for services</b>	There may be an increase for support services such as homeless and advice and this puts further pressure on the Council's budgets	medium
<b>Local Government Reorganisation</b>	There is a risk that the Council will incur costs associated with LGR following the submission for Hertfordshire in November 2025. Hertfordshire Councils	high



<b>Expenditure and Income</b>	<b>Impacted by</b>	<b>Risk (to increase cost)</b>
	have included an amount in their budget's but this may not be sufficient.	
<b>Fees and Charges</b>	The impact of the current economic climate may impact the Council's fees and charges income which is required to support the funding of services.	medium
<b>Core funding</b>	Future years funding set out in the Fair Funding settlement may not be realised if the pressure to reduce public sector costs increases.	high

## **5.7 Climate Change Implications**

- 5.7.1 The Council declared a climate change emergency at the June 2019 Council meeting with a resolution to work towards a target of achieving net zero emissions by 2030. The Digital Strategy will contribute to reducing the Council's carbon footprint. In 2023/24 the Council approved an additional officer post to support its efforts meet its climate change goals. Included in the 2024/25 options was a growth bid to convert the Council's fleet from diesel to use hydrogenated vegetable oil (HVO) in order to reduce the Council's carbon emissions, the full year impact is included in the 2025/26 General Fund budget.

## **5.8 Local Government reform Implications**

- 5.8.1 As part of the timetable for LGR, the Secretary of State's will issue a Direction under section 24 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the Section 24 Direction) and this will place restrictions on different types of expenditure by the Hertfordshire Councils without consent in the period up to vesting day.
- 5.8.2 Section 24 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 allows the Secretary of State to direct that from a certain date the authorities to be dissolved under a Structural Change Order may not, without the written consent of those specified in the direction:
- Dispose of land for more than £100,000 (note: disposals include granting or disposing of any interest in land; entering into a contract to dispose of land or grant or dispose of any such interest; and granting an option to acquire any land or any such interest)
  - Enter into contracts that exceed the following limits Capital £1,000,000+
  - Non-capital £100,000+
 

Note: all of the financial limits set out above would be cumulative from the date enacted.



- 5.8.3 This means all disposals of land and, for contracts, repeat contracts with the same third party or for a similar description of matter as a previous contract are caught.
- 5.8.4 The purpose of a section 24 direction is to ensure that a new authority has oversight of and a degree of control over the decisions of its predecessor councils which could have implications for the finances and plans of that new authority.

## **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

BD1 General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (2025/26-2029/30) September 2025 Cabinet

BD2 Balancing the Budget November 2025 Cabinet

BD3 Fees and Charges October 2025 Cabinet

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix A General Fund Budget Options

Appendix B General Fund Growth Options

Appendix C Risk Assessment of Balances

Appendix D Section 25 Statement including Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves

Appendix E EQIA Council tax increase



Ref No	Name of Service	Description of Savings Proposal	Budget 2025/26	Impact of Saving Proposal on Public/ Customers/ Staff/ Members/Partnerships etc. (include any impact on key corporate programmes/performance indicator measures) .	GF Year 1 (2026/27)	HRA Year 1 (2026/27)	GF Year 2 (2027/28)	HRA Year 2 (2027/28)
2026/S1	Development Management	Introduction of FastTrack applications (Approved in October fees and Charges report but income not yet calculated)	£0	Customers who use this service will be able to secure a faster planning decision. A typical FastTrack application fee charge will be £194 additional and for FastTrack certificate will be £97 additional. More information can be found in the 2026/27 Fees and Charges report to the October Cabinet Appendix D.	£2,910	£0	£2,910	£0
2026/S2	Development Management	Uplift in pre-application fees across a range of application types. (Approved in October fees and Charges report but income not yet calculated)	£57,110	Customers who use the pre-application service will be affected by fee increases. More information can be found in the 2026/27 Fees and Charges report to the October Cabinet Appendix A concerning the fees and charges	£8,000	£0	£8,000	£0
2026/S3	Regeneration	Partners projects advice budget reduction.	£22,110	The saving relates to consultancy budgets for non-priority projects. Key programmes remain unaffected.	£5,000	£0	£5,000	£0
2026/S4	Regeneration	Delete vacant Regeneration post.	£70,430	Changes within the team staffing structure and completion of projects will minimise the impacts of removing this vacant post.	£46,780	£0	£46,780	£0
2026/S5	ICT	Depending on the outcome of a proof of the concepts over the next nine months, replacing the virtual desktop solution with M365 will result in further savings of £40k in 2028/29.	£1,628,850	While not directly affecting external service users, improved staff productivity and system reliability may enhance the quality and responsiveness of public-facing services	£0	£0	£0	£0
2026/S6	Web Team	Banner adverts from blue chip companies on intranet then (website to generate additional income subject to Member approval)	£0	None, as residents can reject cookies and will not see national advertising. Further information on this option is provided in Appendix C	£4,000	£0	£4,000	£0
2026/S7	Customer Services	A management saving is proposed within the Customer Service Centre through the deletion of one management role. No redundancies are expected, as temporary arrangements are currently in place.	£45,000	No significant impact anticipated, the change will be managed within existing processes	£12,150	£21,600	£16,200	£28,800
2026/S8	Web Team	To maximise the use of Microsoft 365, plan is to move the Intranet platform from the current supplier to M365.	£15,300	None	£0	£0	£9,180	£6,120
2026/S9	Refuse and Recycling	Charging new developments for waste and recycling receptacles (new income stream) Officers have undertaken a comprehensive review of all associated costs involved in the process, from the initial request through to site inspection and final delivery. As a result, a revised pricing model has been developed to ensure full cost recovery.	£0	This will help to recover the costs of new bins provided and replaced for new developments. Although the projected additional income from bin deliveries will not materialise until 2027/28 onwards, approval is sought at this stage to enable officers to begin issuing charging packs to external developers from this financial year (2025/26). Early approval ensures timely implementation of the revised cost recovery model and allows the service to operate transparently and consistently with developers	£0	£0	£8,100	£0
2026/S10	Third party tipping	New charges resulting in additional income/covering cost including Gate fee, Missed appointment and Cancelled appointment	£0	These charges will help to optimise the service by reducing the number / frequency of lost booking income.	£5,800	£0	£5,800	£0
<b>Total Savings</b>			<b>£1,838,800</b>		<b>£84,640</b>	<b>£21,600</b>	<b>£105,970</b>	<b>£34,920</b>



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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL  
BALANCING THE BUDGET 2026-27 GROWTH PROPOSALS

APPENDIX B: GF Growth Options

Ref No	Name of Service	Description of Growth Proposal	Budget 2025/26	Impact of Growth Proposal on Public/ Customers/ Staff/ Members/Partnerships etc. (include any impact on key corporate programmes/performance indicator measures) .	GF Year 1 (2026/27)	HRA Year 1 (2026/27)	GF Year 2 (2027/28)	HRA Year 2 (2027/28)
2026/G1	Engineering & Parking	Additional Parking Management Officer Post	£436,930	Staff - creation of an additional post to provide additional resources within the Engineering and Parking Section in order to manage the increase in parking restrictions / permit zones being rolled out across the town. 2028/29 costs are reduced by £10K income for parking permits	£46,000	£0	£46,000	£0
2026/G2	Town Centre	The proposal requests funding of £47,400 per year to continue delivering free, inclusive events and maintain key infrastructure at Event Island.	£0	Continued funding will enhance public access to free, inclusive events and strengthen community partnerships through grants and shared delivery. It supports key corporate aims around town centre vibrancy, cultural engagement, and social inclusion.	£47,400	£0	£47,400	£0
2026/G3	Procurement	Staffing restructure required to deliver Procurement Act 2023, which has recently come into force (net growth after other budgets re-alignments)	£65,000	The service has 3 staff which support a shared service across East Herts, Hertsmere and SBC. The additional staff resource is supported by the Senior Leadership Team and will ensure that new regulations as a result of the new Procurement Act 2023 are delivered effectively. The remainder of the posts costs have been identified from changes in the finance team.	£1,740	£7,260	£1,740	£7,260
2026/G4	Leisure	80th Celebration of Stevenage (one-off)	£0	Stevenage is celebrating its 80th anniversary in 2026. Like previous anniversary celebrations, there will be a range of events and activities across service areas led by the portfolio holder. The £50,000 one-off growth budget will enhance this programme.	£50,000	£0	£0	£0
<b>Total Growth</b>			<b>£501,930</b>		<b>£145,140</b>	<b>£7,260</b>	<b>£95,140</b>	<b>£7,260</b>



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APPENDIX C: RISK BASED ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL OF GENERAL FUND BALANCES 2026/27

Potential Risk Area	Comments including any mitigation factors		
Income from areas within the base budget where the Council raises "Fees and Charges"	Potential risk that the budgeted level of income from activities where the Council is charging for services will not be achieved. This is anticipated largely to be as a result of the downturn in economy and cost of living crisis, but could also be as a result of poor weather, new competition. All "fees and charges" income is reviewed as part of the monthly/quarterly budget monitoring process. All budgets are profiled over the year based upon previous experience.		
		Calculated Risk	
Specific Areas	Estimated Income	Likelihood Percentage	Balances Required
Parking Income* (on street/off-street)	£5,700,010	3.0%	£171,000
Development Control Income	£572,130	4.0%	£22,885
Recycling Income	£1,976,540	5.0%	£98,827
Garages	£4,510,630	3.0%	£135,319
Trade Refuse & Skips	£1,257,840	10.0%	£125,784
Indoor Market	£287,870	10.0%	£28,787
Commercial Property Income	£4,298,940	3.0%	£128,968
Lower fees and charges in excess of budgeted from continual post of Cost of Living			£125,000
Total			£836,571

\* The council has a parking account which identifies how parking fees are spent on parking and related costs

Potential Risk Area	Comments		
Demand Led Budgets	Potential risk that spending on parts of the budget where the Council has a legal duty to provide the service increases significantly. Individual budgets reviewed as part of the monthly budget monitoring process. All budgets are profiled over the year based upon previous experience and so any variances should show up during the year.		
		Calculated Risk	
Specific Areas	Estimated Exposure	Likelihood Percentage	Balances Required
Housing Benefit maximum risk based on not meeting threshold for Local Authority errors.	£70,216	40%	£28,086
Loss of Business Rates yield	£3,609,322	maximum loss (0%)	£0
Increase in bad debts as a economic changes impacting on charging for services	£228,780	100%	£228,780
Bed and Breakfast budget been reduced based on current trends. However, there's a risk that demand could increase.	£80,000	75%	£59,400
Risk of capital works requiring funding as a result of rephasing/deferring works in the Capital Strategy	£250,000	50%	£125,000
Impact of Local Government Reorganisation costs are higher than budgeted for	£500,000	75%	£375,000
Housing Benefit overpayment net income reduces and results in a pressure on the General Fund	£346,840	10%	£34,684
Cost of new food waste service is higher than estimated	£554,790	10%	£55,479
Total			£906,429

Potential Risk Area	Comments including any mitigation factors		
Changes since budget was set	Potential risk that things change since the budget estimates were made and the estimates are then under budgeted for.		
		Calculated Risk	
Specific Areas	Estimated Exposure	Likelihood Percentage	Balances Required
Transitional Vacancy Rate 4.5%	£876,830	20.00%	£175,366
Less staff time charged to capital than budgeted	£490,510	10.00%	£49,051
REVISED: pay award is higher than budgeted for 1%	£24,588,471		£241,563
Contractual inflation 1% increase	£12,611,343	1.00%	£48,135
Utility and fuel inflation usage/costs increase	£1,214,060	10.00%	£121,406
Borrowing costs will be higher than estimated on new borrowing in Capital Strategy	£1,756,000	1% increase in borrowing costs for the garage programme	£17,560
Total			£653,081

Potential Risk Area	Comments including any mitigation factors		
Other Risks	Potential risk that savings options will not be realised as a result of delay or unforeseen circumstances.		
		Calculated Risk	
Specific Areas	Estimated Exposure	Likelihood Percentage	Balances Required
Savings Options	£1,280,746	5.00%	£64,037
Total			£64,037

Potential Risk Area	Comments including any mitigation factors		
Estimated balances required for any over spend or under -recovery of expenditure and income	This calculation replaces the calculation based on Net Expenditure		
		Calculated Risk	
Specific Areas	Estimated Exposure	Likelihood Percentage	Balances Required
Gross Income (excludes specific income listed above)	£63,001,940	1.00%	£630,019
Gross Expenditure (excludes specific expenditure listed above)	£55,821,770	1.00%	£558,218
Total			£1,188,237

Level of Balances Assumed in General Fund Based on risk £3,648,355



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**Statement of the Chief finance Officer Section 25 Statement including  
Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves**

**1 ROBUSTNESS OF ESTIMATES**

The Council process for producing the budget estimates involves responsible budget holders and finance officers reviewing and projecting the Base Budget. The Working Budget Estimates are determined against a background of ongoing quarterly budget monitoring for the current financial year and an evaluation of the outturn position and Budgets carried forward from the previous financial year. The 2026/27 Estimates are determined by evaluating and costing all known changes, including pay and price levels, legislative changes, demands for services and policy developments. Projecting inflation has become much more difficult with fluctuating utility costs and pay inflation. The Council has sufficient reserves in order to set a balanced budget for 2026/27 and the current Budget Process has rigorously reviewed current budgets. As part of the 2026/27 Budget process the Council has included the positive impact of Fair Funding which has partly reversed historic Government Grant reductions. The overall budget process is co-ordinated by the Accountancy Section in liaison with the various Business Units and the Council's Strategic Leadership Team. The Budget is recommended by the Cabinet, for approval by Council after it has been through the Scrutiny process required by the Council's Constitution. The process includes consideration of risks and uncertainties associated with projections of future pay, prices, interest rates and projected levels and timing of other potential liabilities. The challenge to the budget process is provided by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee.

Financial monitoring arrangements provide the Cabinet with a quarterly update on the performance of the budget, with action plans where any significant adverse variances have resulted. The MTFS is under constant review to ensure that a clear financial position for the Council can be demonstrated for the next five years aided by the Council's BTB priority. This is necessary as the Councils in Hertfordshire transition into new unitary authorities and all of the model submissions (two, three and four Unitary) require savings to be delivered. The 2026/27 funding settlement was higher than the MTFS projected, however this included the funding for new separate food waste that the Council had assumed would be in addition to the projected funding. The multi-year settlements beyond 2026/27 improve projecting the level of annual savings required. The CFO has identified that further new BTB savings options are required for 2027/28-2029/30 of just £800K to ensure a balanced General Fund budget which could be met from annual fees and charges increases. There is a small annual allowance for growth and a 2.99% increase in council tax beyond 2026/27.

The Council's Financial Regulations require responsible budget holders to ensure that net expenditure does not exceed the total of their Service budgets. Where, despite the assessment of risks that forms part of the budget process, a budget comes under pressure during the course of the financial year, the Council's budgetary framework and Financial Regulations lay down appropriate procedures. Where budget variations cannot be contained overall by the use of virements, these have been reported to Members as part of the quarterly budget monitoring process. In addition, requests for supplementary estimates have to be submitted to the



Executive or Full Council, as appropriate. Supplementary estimates are met from available balances and reserves, subject to the required level of minimum General Fund balances.

The Strategic Director (S151) considers that the Estimates and the processes used to produce them are sound and robust. A further update on the 2025/26 General Fund and HRA budgets will be included in the February Draft Budget report and also presented to the March Cabinet, together with any on-going impacts.

## **2 ADEQUACY OF RESERVES**

The Council's annual budgetary process and the assessment of the adequacy of Reserves are undertaken in the context of robust medium term financial forecasting. The Council currently has levels of Reserves above the minimum risk assessed level, the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (with the delivery of £800K of savings and inflation and pressures in line with MTFS projections. This is based on the assumption that future year's funding settlement is in line with the provisional settlement published on the 17 December 2025.

The Council has risk assessed the level of General Fund balances required, based on information from service managers the level of reserves required for 2026/27 is £3,648,355, (see also Appendix C to the main report).

Total available General Fund balances as at 1st April 2026 are estimated to be £7,591,735 (after 2025/26 contribution to balances of £530,373). Total General Fund balances as at 1st April 2027 are estimated to be £7,593,317 (after 2026/27 contribution to balances of £1,581). These levels of balances meet the minimum level of risk assessed balances that are needed to meet unforeseen expenditure arising in the year and expenses arising before income is received and ensure the Council is financially resilient going into LGR.

Total available HRA balances as at 1st April 2026 are estimated to be £10.338Million (after 2025/26 contribution from balances of £588K). Total HRA balances as at 1st April 2027 are estimated to be £10.480Million (after 2026/27 contribution to balances of £142K). These levels of balances meet the minimum level of risk assessed balances that are needed to meet unforeseen expenditure arising in the year and expenses arising before income is received.

The HRA also has an earmarked reserve for the repayment of debt which is estimated to be £16.7Million as at 1st April 2026 and £8.7Million as at 1 April 2027.

It is estimated that the Council will have General Fund £32,518 capital receipts and £2.453Million regeneration ring fenced receipts and £250,000 capital reserves as at 1st April 2027 and the Council has a need to borrow in 2026/27 £45.11Million including for the HRA £35.61Million for capital plus £7.789Million for conversion of internal debt to borrowing and £9.5Million for the General Fund of which £5.9Million is short term borrowing).

In assessing the adequacy of the council's reserves, the robustness of its Budgetary Process and Systems of Internal Control, the assumptions and uncertainties



discussed in the Budget report, and the levels of special provision have been considered.

In coming to a view on the adequacy of reserves, risks in the area of litigation, business continuity, civil emergency, failure of information systems, budgetary control and interest rate calculations have been considered in terms of the possible maximum financial impact and their probability of occurrence. Ongoing assessment of the financial risks to the council, its budget and MTFS, are embedded as part of the Council's overall Corporate Risk Management processes. On this basis, the Strategic Director (S151) considers the level of general balances to be adequate for the 2026/27 financial year.

### **3 SPECIFIC RESERVES**

As part of the budget preparation process, the current and projected levels of the Council's ringfenced reserves have been considered. Following this review, the Strategic Director (S151) confirms these reserves are £10,0123,482 for the General Fund as at 1 April 2026 and £9,179,263 as at 1 April 2027 and continue to be required, (see also paragraph 4.11.6 of the main report for the individual reserve balances and need).

### **4. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

At the time of publishing this report the Council's last set of published and audited accounts were for the financial year 2023/24 and officers are finalising with the council's auditors Azets the 2024/25 accounts.

Supported by the Financial Reporting Council, The Ministry for Housing Communities and local government (MHCLG) set a backstop date of 27 February 2026 for Local Authorities to publish their 2024/25 audited financial accounts. This approach with the earlier backstop deadlines is anticipated to enable Local Authorities and auditors to focus on the most recent year of accounts as quickly as possible and the Council complied with this. This is particularly important as the Councils transition into LGR.



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# Appendix D EQIA Council Tax Increase



Council Tax Increase

## Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) Form

December 2025

<b>Date created</b>	December 2025
<b>Approved by</b>	Cabinet/SLT
<b>Owner</b>	Clare Fletcher, Strategic Director
<b>Version</b>	1.0
<b>Author</b>	Atif Iqbal – Assistant Director of Finance & Deputy S151 Officer
<b>Business Unit and Team</b>	Finance

Please [click this link](#) to find the EqIA guidance toolkit for support in completing the following form.

For translations, braille or large print versions of this document please email  
[equalities@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@stevenage.gov.uk).



**First things first:**

**Does this policy, project, service, or other decision need an EqlA?**

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Council Tax Increase</b>	
<b>Please answer Yes or No to the following questions:</b>		
Does it affect staff, service users or the wider community?	Yes	
Has it been identified as being important to particular groups of people?	Yes	
Does it or could it potentially affect different groups of people differently (unequal)?	Yes	
Does it relate to an area where there are known inequalities or exclusion issues?	No	
Will it have an impact on how other organisations operate?	No	
Is there potential for it to cause controversy or affect the council's reputation as a public service provider?	No	

<b>Where a positive impact is likely, will this help to:</b>	
Remove discrimination and harassment?	No
Promote equal opportunities?	No
Encourage good relations?	No

**If you answered 'Yes' to one or more of the above questions you should carry out an EqlA.**

Or if you answered 'No' to all of the questions and decide that your activity doesn't need an EqlA you must explain below why it has no relevance to equality and diversity.

You should reference the information you used to support your decision below and seek approval from your Assistant Director before confirming this by sending this page to [equalities@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@stevenage.gov.uk).

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I determine that no EqlA is needed to inform the decision on the Council Tax increase for 2026/27.

Name of assessor:

Decision approved by:

Role:

Role:

Date:

Date:



# Equality Impact Assessment Form Appendix C

For a policy, project, strategy, staff or service change, or other decision that is new, changing or under review

<b>What is being assessed?</b>		<b>Council Tax Increase</b>			
Lead Assessor	Atif Iqbal			Assessment team	Revenues and Benefits Finance
Start date	01/04/2026	End date	31/03/2027		
When will the EqlA be reviewed? (Typically every 2 years)		01/01/27			

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Who may be affected by the proposed project?	Residents of the borough
What are the key aims of the proposed project?	<p>To increase Council Tax in 2026/27 by a total 2.99%, this equates to increase of £7.37 to £253.78 for a band D property or 14p per week.</p> <p>Whilst it is recognised that any Council Tax increase will have a negative impact on Council Taxpayers, the Stevenage Borough Council element represents just 10.8% of the overall bill and a 2.99% increase was assumed in the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) assumptions for all of the three unitary models submitted. The increase represents a below inflation increase (November CPI 3.2%) and ensures that a lower level of savings is required in the next three years (£800K) and continued provision of services and a balanced budget.</p> <p>When Government determines the funding available to each Council as part of the settlement, it presumes that councils will increase up to the maximum allowed. For Stevenage it is 2.99% for 2026/27.</p> <p>It should be noted that majority of residents are in bands C and below and the increase in those properties are as follows:</p>



	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H
Number of Households	1,692	6,959	21,853	3,428	3,314	994	437	17
SBC 2025/26 Council Tax	£164.27	£191.65	£219.03	£246.41	£301.17	£356.93	£410.68	£492.82
SBC Proposed 2026/27 Council Tax	£169.18	£197.38	£225.58	£253.78	£310.17	£367.60	£422.96	£507.56
Increase	£4.91	£5.73	£6.55	£7.37	£9.00	£10.67	£12.28	£14.74

For residents not in receipt of Council Tax Support, they will be liable to pay the full amount of the proposed increase. Resident is full receipts of CTS will only pay a maximum of 8.5% of their Council Tax.

For residents entitles to single person discount their council tax bill is reduced by 25%.

What **positive measures** are in place (if any) to help **fulfil our legislative duties** to:

Remove discrimination & harassment

Promote equal opportunities

The Council has agreed a Council Tax Support Scheme (November 2025 Cabinet) where elderly CTS claimants are protected in law and their wards will always be based on 100% of the council tax charge. Working Age

Encourage good relations



			<p>claimants will be based on 91.5% of their council tax liability.</p> <p>Stevenage also has an exceptional hardship scheme available.</p>		
--	--	--	---	--	--

What sources of data / information are you using to inform your assessment?	<p>Council Tax system (CTB1 form)</p> <p>Financial Settlement confirming the referendum limits for SBC below 3%</p> <p>Herts-Insight data</p> <p>Council Tax Support Scheme</p>
---	---

In assessing the potential impact on people, are there any overall comments that you would like to make?	
--	--



## Evidence and Impact Assessment

Explain the potential impact and opportunities it could have for people in terms of the following characteristics, where applicable:

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Age					
Positive impact		Negative impact	Residents may be experiencing exceptional economic hardship as well as increases in energy, food and fuel costs. This may have a greater impact on older people and disabled people, who may have additional needs for heating and to run particular equipment and may also have lower income / be reliant on pensions and/or benefits.	Unequal impact	The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups. Residents who are living in single occupancy will receive 25% discount, and elderly residents entitled to Council Tax Support will receive 100% discount, whilst working age entitled to Council Tax Support will receive discount up to 91.5%.
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	This affects all adults that live within the Borough. There is support available through the Councils CTS scheme and the discretionary hardship fund. The Council are continuing to provide the current CTS scheme at a maximum 8.5% for working age person and up to 100% for older persons. Council Tax payment options, such as 12 monthly and 44 weekly instalments in a year via direct debit and standing order are offered at the billing stage. The availability of the Discretionary Council Tax Hardship fund is promoted through Council Tax Support notification letters, in Council Tax reminder and final notices, on the Council's website. Applications for assistance from other				



discretionary schemes such as Discretionary Housing Payment and where appropriate assistance is awarded under the Discretionary Council Tax Hardship fund as well.

Stevenage has an estimated total population of 91,774 as of mid-2024. The demographic profile indicates that Stevenage continues to have a comparatively smaller older population than both Hertfordshire and England.

	Stevenage	Hertfordshire	England
Aged under 16	20,891 (22.8%)	19.8%	18.3%
Aged 16 to 64	56,504 (61.6%)	62.7%	62.8%
Aged 65 and over	14,379 (15.7%)	17.5%	18.9%

CTS data as at November 2025 and 2024

	2025		2024	
	Numbers	Percentage	Numbers	Percentage
Working Age	3,169	61.97%	3,030	60.78%
Elderly	1,945	38.03%	1,955	39.22%
Total	5,114	100%	4,985	100%

What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?

What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)

**Disability e.g., physical impairment, mental ill health, learning difficulties, long-standing illness**



Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups.
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>In terms of Council Tax Support, disabled households are those where a disability related welfare benefit is in payment. We recognise that people with disabilities are historically disadvantaged and face greater barriers when accessing information about services and therefore consider disabled households to be more vulnerable than other households.</p> <p>Within the 2021 Census data, 15,468 (or 17.3%) residents assessed themselves as disabled under the Equalities Act 2010.</p> <p>The Council are continuing to provide the current CTS scheme therefore, there are no additional adverse impacts on this protected group resulting from these proposals.</p>				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

Gender Reassignment					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	✓
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>There is no evidence to suggest any specific impacts on residents within any of these protected characteristic groups.</p> <p>The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups.</p>				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		



Marriage or Civil Partnership					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	✓
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>There is no evidence to suggest any specific impacts on residents within any of these protected characteristic groups.</p> <p>The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups.</p>				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

Pregnancy & Maternity					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	✓
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>There is no evidence to suggest any specific impacts on residents within any of these protected characteristic groups.</p> <p>The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups.</p>				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

Race					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	✓



Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>There is no evidence to suggest any specific impacts on residents within any of these protected characteristic groups.</p> <p>The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups.</p>		
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	

Religion or Belief					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	✓
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>There is no evidence to suggest any specific impacts on residents within any of these protected characteristic groups.</p> <p>The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups.</p>				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)			

Sex					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	✓
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>There is no evidence to suggest any specific impacts on residents within any of these protected characteristic groups.</p> <p>The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups.</p>				



What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	
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Sexual Orientation e.g., straight, lesbian / gay, bisexual					
Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	✓
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	<p>There is no evidence to suggest any specific impacts on residents within any of these protected characteristic groups.</p> <p>The increase is applied to all properties; it is not possible to exempt any particular groups.</p>				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)			

## Socio-economic<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Although non-statutory, the council has chosen to implement the Socio-Economic Duty and so decision-makers should use their discretion to consider the impact on people with a socio-economic disadvantage.



e.g., low income, unemployed, homelessness, caring responsibilities, access to internet, public transport users, social value in procurement					
Positive impact		Negative impact	Council Tax increase could negatively affect residents in a lower socio-economic standing as they will have a financial challenge.	Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	Using the latest English Indices of Deprivation 2025, Stevenage is now ranked 113th most deprived lower-tier local authority out of 317 in England. This reflects a slight increase in relative deprivation compared with the 2019 ranking, where Stevenage was placed 117th. There is limited data held to break this down further.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	Identify and support those who are struggling utilising various support streams, the main one being Council Tax Support (CTS) where currently there are 3,169 working age and 1,945 elderly claimants receiving CTS. CTS scheme is a variable scheme based on each person's individual circumstances which is then used to assess their level of entitlement. On top of this, the Council operates an Exceptional Hardship Scheme for short time emergency fund.		What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

Additional Considerations
Please outline any other potential impact on people in any other contexts



Positive impact		Negative impact		Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment					
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?			What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)		

## Consultation Findings

Document any feedback gained from the following groups of people:

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Staff?			
Voluntary & community sector?			
Other stakeholders?			

## Overall Conclusion & Future Activity

Explain the <b>overall findings</b> of the assessment and <b>reasons for outcome (please choose one):</b>		
1. No inequality, inclusion issues or opportunities to further improve have been identified		
Negative / unequal impact, barriers to inclusion or	2a. Adjustments made	
	2b. Continue as planned	



improvement opportunities identified	2c. Stop and remove	
--------------------------------------	---------------------	--

Detail the <b>actions that are needed</b> as a result of this assessment and how they will help to <b>remove discrimination &amp; harassment, promote equal opportunities</b> and / or <b>encourage good relations</b> :				
Action	Will this help to remove, promote and / or encourage?	Responsible officer	Deadline	How will this be embedded as business as usual?
Monitor through the monthly reports to establish the impact of the council tax increase and the challenges relating to affordability and provide residents with support accordingly.	Promote the support that the Council offers through the Council Tax Support Scheme and Exceptional Hardship Scheme.	Revenues and Benefits staff	Ongoing	Current practice is to ensure staff continue to support residents who are struggling to make payment either through considering the schemes available or through providing payment plans

**Approved by Assistant Director:** Atif Iqbal

**Date:** 22.12.2025

Please send this EqlA to [equalities@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@stevenage.gov.uk) for critical friend feedback and for final submittance with the associated project.



**Meeting** CABINET  
**Portfolio Area** Resources and Performance  
**Date** 14 January 2026



## **DRAFT GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY 2025/26-2029/30**

### **KEY DECISION**

**Authors** Rhona Bellis  
**Contributors** Senior Leadership Team  
**Lead Officers** Atif Iqbal  
**Contact Officer** Clare Fletcher

### **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To approve revisions to the 2025/26 Capital Programme and Strategy and approve the draft 2026/27 Capital Programme for consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.2. To provide Members with an update on the Council's draft Five-Year Capital Strategy and the resources available to fund the Capital Strategy.
- 1.3. To provide Members with an update on the Council's investment strategy as required by the updated prudential code.
- 1.4. To set out the Council's approach to funding its key priorities.
- 1.5. To update Members on the work of the Council's Financial Security Group (CFSG) in reviewing all General Fund capital bids prior to inclusion in the draft 2026/27 Capital Strategy.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the:

- 2.1. General Fund growth bids identified for inclusion in the Capital Strategy (section 4.2, and Appendix A to the report) be approved in principle, including the proposed budget level in the deferred works reserve budget of £650K.
- 2.2. Virements in paragraph 4.3.5 be approved.



- 2.3. To update Members on the work of the Council's Financial Security Group (CFSG) in reviewing all General Fund capital bids prior to inclusion in the final 2026/27 Capital Strategy to the February 2026 Cabinet.
- 2.4. Draft General Fund Capital Budget for 2025/26 to 2029/30 of £117Million, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be included into the Council's budget setting processes for consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.5. Approach to resourcing the General Fund capital programme as outlined in the report (Paragraph 4.4) be approved.
- 2.6. The revenue contribution to capital, 2026/27 to 2028/29 as set out in table 2, paragraph 4.2.1 be included into the Council's budget setting processes for consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.7. 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.
- 2.8. That the proposed use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) contributions as set out in section 4.6 be included into the Council's budget setting processes for consideration by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.9. To note 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.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

- 3.1.1. The purpose of the Capital Strategy is to outline how the Council determines its priorities for capital investment and how much it can afford to borrow as well as setting out any associated risks.
- 3.1.2. The framework the government uses to control how much Councils can afford to spend on capital investment is known as the Prudential Framework. The objectives of the Prudential Code, requires local authorities to produce a capital strategy to demonstrate that capital expenditure and investment decisions are taken in line with long-term objectives and take account of stewardship, value for money, prudence, sustainability, and affordability.
- 3.1.3. The definition of an investment covers all the financial assets of a local authority as well as other non-financial assets that the organisation holds primarily or partially to generate a profit; for example, investment property portfolios.
- 3.1.4. The Prudential Code requires authorities to look at capital expenditure and investment plans in the light of overall organisational strategy and resources and ensure that decisions are made with sufficient regard to the long-term financing implications and potential risks to the authority.
- 3.1.5. The Capital Strategy is a key document for the Council and forms part of the authority's integrated revenue, capital, and balance sheet planning. It provides a high-level overview of how capital expenditure; capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of services. It also provides an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future financial



sustainability. It includes an overview of the governance processes for developing proposals, approval, and monitoring of capital expenditure.

- 3.1.6. The Capital Strategy specifically excludes investments that are entered into under Treasury Management powers; these are covered in the Treasury Management Strategy. The Treasury Management Strategy also includes the policy for borrowing to finance capital expenditure.

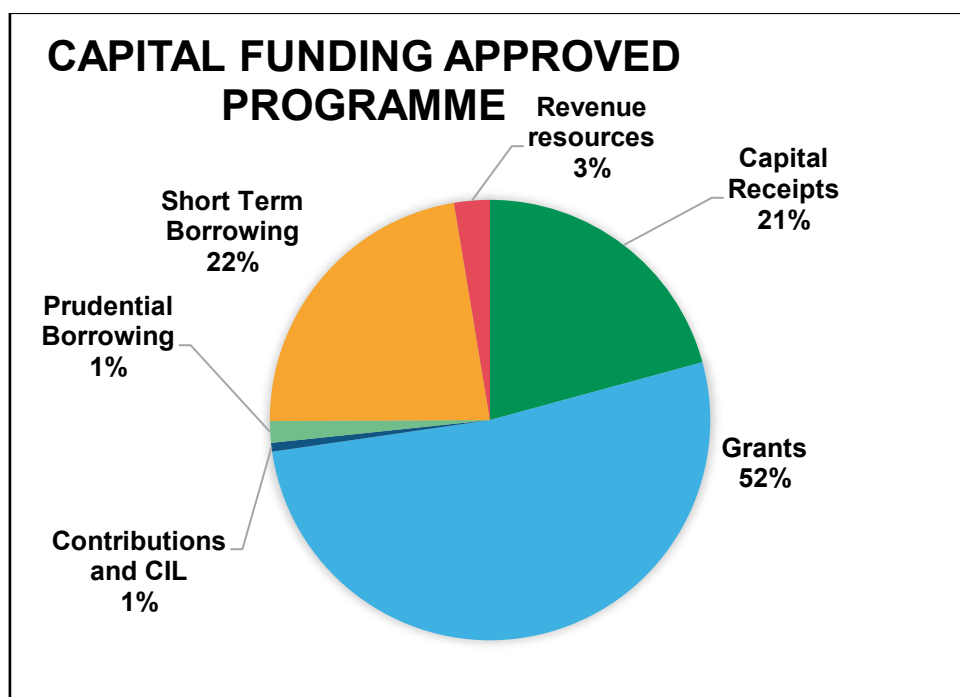
### **General Fund Investment Strategy**

- 3.2.1 For a number of years capital spend has been significantly prioritised due to the limited availability of capital receipts and the Council's ability to afford borrowing costs. Accordingly, the Council applied a 'fix on fail' approach to assets with no significant asset improvements being funded, with the exception of those supported through external funding or partially through external funding. This approach cannot be sustained in the medium to long term as it will lead to a gradual degradation of the Council's assets with reactive works only being undertaken to keep sites wind and watertight. Sustaining such an approach in the medium term will inevitably lead to close of buildings even before consideration is given to the legal requirements in terms of Energy Performance Certificate (EPC's) and other legal and climate change requirements.
- 3.2.2 To address the issues above, The General Fund Capital Strategy Overview - Priorities versus Funding Requirement 2023/24-2029/30 report to Executive 15 November 2023 set out the Council's key capital regeneration and community asset ambitions and key land and asset disposals, to determine a funding strategy to meet corporate objectives and address the issues outlined above.
- 3.2.3 The following priority schemes / activities required a funding strategy:
- Regeneration SG1- Public Sector Hub, Leisure Centre, and Theatre
  - Climate Change - green fleet, buildings (operational, community and commercial)
  - Towns fund programme where match funding is required
  - Operational need investment in Community Assets
  - Response to Legislative changes e.g. waste and recycling
  - Protection of key income streams to ensure the financial resilience of the General Fund
- 3.2.4 The high-level assessment in the report of potential value of capital receipts that could be realised by SBC is £44Million which is significantly less than the need identified of £127Million. This means that even if all approved receipts were delivered there will still be a requirement to find alternative funding strategies or third-party funding to meet the gap. The total high level investment requirement and total receipt realisation are currently excluded from the Capital Strategy but will come forward in future reiterations of the programme as projects are approved.
- 3.2.5 The current limited funding available compared to the identified current need means (prior to funding recommended in the Draft 2026/27 General Fund budget) that in the main priority schemes will need to provide a significant element of self-funding through providing land development opportunities.



3.2.6 The current years capital programme (approved February 2025 and as subsequently amended through the quarterly monitoring and supplementary reports), is fully funded, and shown in the chart below which reflects the quarter two monitoring report to the November 2025 Cabinet.

- Grants includes £19.2Million Towns Fund Grant from an overall allocation of £37.5Million which is fully allocated to specific regeneration projects. Funding is received in stages as relevant projects proceed.
- Short term borrowing is used to bridge funding gaps and is generally “repaid” from capital receipts in the following years.
- Prudential Borrowing remains an option to fund capital schemes. Due to the on-going net cost to the General Fund, any such proposal requires a business case to be completed to determine affordability and benefit to the Council. This approach may be used to fund income generating schemes which support the Councils Priorities.



### 3.3 Budget and Policy Framework

3.3.1 The process for approving capital budgets is set out in the Budget and Policy Framework in the Constitution. This includes a consultation period, and the timescale required to implement this is outlined below:

Table 1 Date	Meeting	Report
Jan-26	Cabinet	Draft 2025/26 – 2029/30 Capital Strategy (GF)
	Overview and Scrutiny	Draft 2025/26 – 2029/30 Capital Strategy (GF)
Feb-26	Cabinet	Final 2025/26 – 2029/30 Capital Strategy (GF)



Table 1 Date	Meeting	Report
	Overview and Scrutiny	Final 2025/26 – 2029/30 Capital Strategy (GF)
Feb-26	Special Council	Final 2025/26 – 2029/30 Capital Strategy (GF)

## 4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

### 4.1 Capital Programme – General Fund

- 4.1.1. The financial pressures as set out section 3 of this report resulted in only the most urgent bids or those supporting the delivery of a top priority being included in the list of capital growth for consideration by members.
- 4.1.2. Budgets in the Capital Strategy are reviewed quarterly to ensure that they remain relevant and deliverable. No significant changes to the phasing of the existing Capital Strategy presented to members at Q2 are expected at the time of drafting this report.

### 4.2. Proposed Capital Bids from 2026/27

The proposed capital growth bids received and recommended for inclusion in the Capital Strategy (to be reviewed by Council's Financial Security Group (CFSG)) have been prioritised by the Council's Senior Leadership (SLT), as set out in the table below and are detailed in Appendix A. These bids total £7Million for 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29. The increase in the recommended capital programme has benefited from increased resources as a result of the Fair Funding set out in the Draft 2026/27 General Fund Budget and summarised below in section 4.2 of this report.

- 4.2.1. The proposed growth can be split into four types as illustrated in the graph below and the detail of the individual bids are summarised in Appendix A.

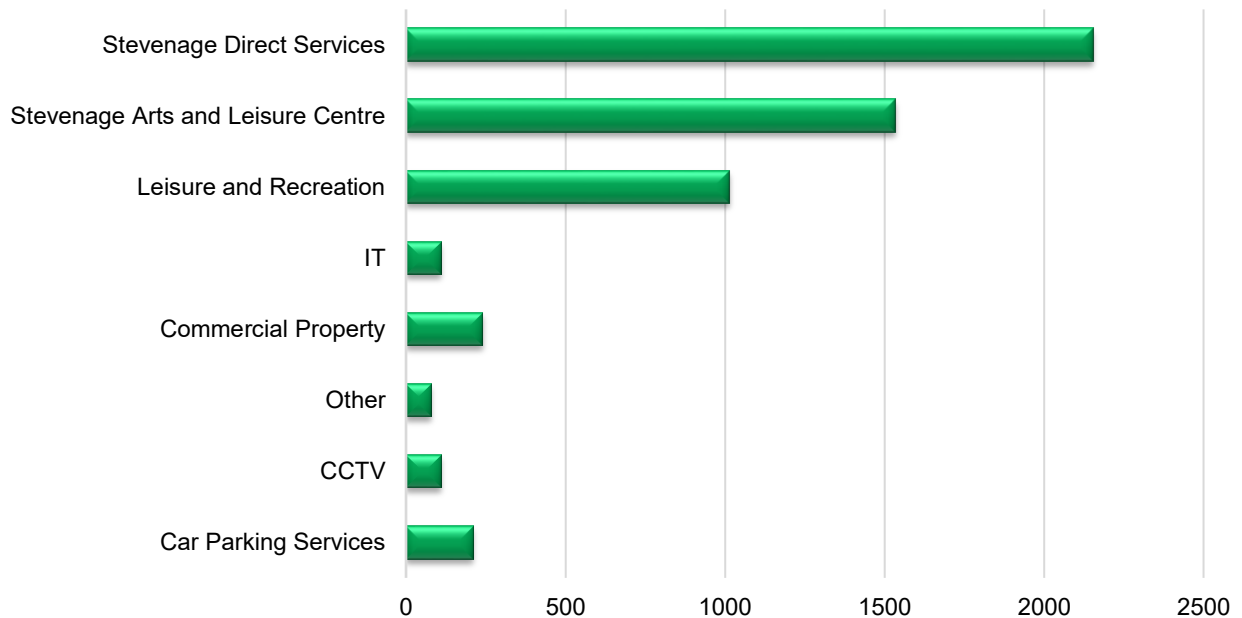
Table 2 Proposed General Fund Growth 2026/27 – 2028/29 £000					
		26/27	27/28	28/29	Total
Priority 1	Financial Return	135	1,010	0	1,145
Priority 3	Mandatory requirements (including Health & Safety)	60	525	25	610
Priority 4	Schemes to maintain operational efficiency	2,795	783	1,009	4,587
	Deferred works reserve	400	250	0	650
<b>Total Proposed Capital Growth Bids</b>		<b>3,390</b>	<b>2,568</b>	<b>1,034</b>	<b>6,992</b>
<b>Funding Proposal</b>					
General Capital Receipts		1,615	1,348	14	2,977
Revenue contributions		1,200	1,200	1,200	3,600
EPR Funding		500	0	0	500



**Table 2 Proposed General Fund Growth 2026/27 – 2028/29 £000**

	<b>26/27</b>	<b>27/28</b>	<b>28/29</b>	<b>Total</b>
CIL	35	0	0	35
Match Funding Contributions	40	20	20	80
<b>Total Funding Available</b>	<b>3,390</b>	<b>2,568</b>	<b>1,234</b>	<b>7,192</b>

### Total Proposed Growth by Type £000



4.2.2. As a result of the positive impact on the Council of the Fair Funding review (Balancing the Budget - Cabinet November 2025 and the Draft General Fund and Council Tax Setting 2026/27 – elsewhere in this agenda), the Council has benefited from the revised system for allocating government funds.

4.2.3. This benefit has enabled a potential proposed significant increase in investment in the Councils' assets for 2026/27 and future years, which has not been possible for many years and if approved will help ensure the operational viability and future of a number of significant local assets for the town.

4.2.4. These investments include

- £1.8Million for fleet replacements for waste and recycling collection and maintenance of the Council's parks and open spaces.
- £535k for Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre (SLAC) to improve customers and performers experience – new carpets, lighting, and sound systems
- £1Million to re-purpose the sports hall at SALC – creating a new space able to host higher profile events.
- £500k replacement of the track at Ridlins to ensure it retains county status.

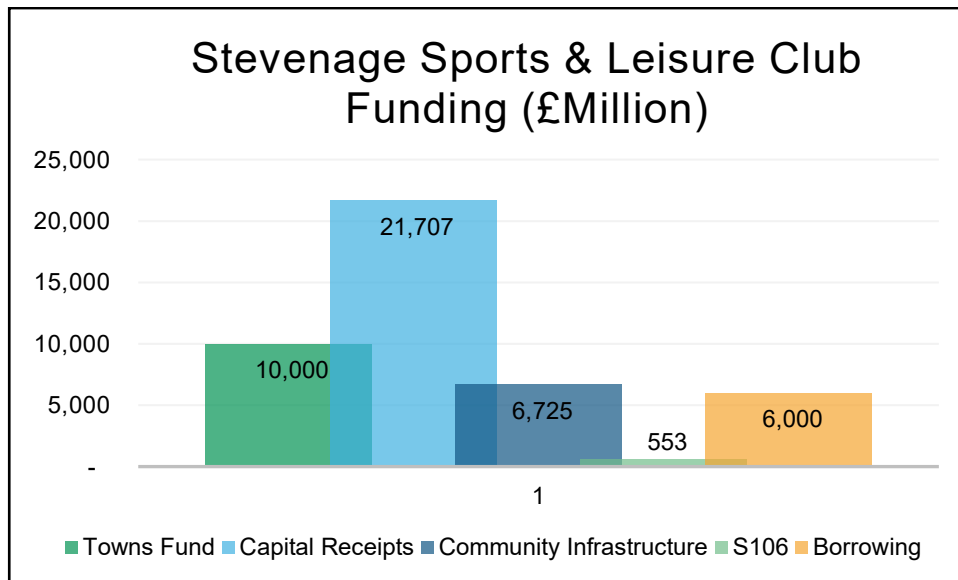


- £490k investment in new play equipment, shrub bed improvements and other green space infrastructure
- 4.2.5. Included in the proposed bids is a £650k increase in the deferred works reserve budget across 2026/27 and 2027/28 to fund asset condition surveys and to add capacity to the capital program in case any deferred bids become urgent.
- 4.2.6. Total funding identified for future years capital growth amounted to £7.2Million. The proposed bids for consideration above amount to £7Million. The modest surplus funding identified could be used to fund bids that have not been put forward for approval and remain unfunded – see Appendix C, in addition further bids may also be required in the future arising from stock condition surveys.
- 4.3. Revised Summary Capital Programme 2025/26 – 2028/29 including Proposed Growth**
- 4.3.1. The revised Capital Strategy for 2025/26 – 2028/29 totals £117Million which includes the proposed growth bids of £7Million. This is summarised by service in the table below, and in detail in Appendix B.

<b>Table 3: Revised Capital Programme including proposed growth by Service £000</b>						
	<b>25/26</b>	<b>26/27</b>	<b>27/28</b>	<b>28/29</b>	<b>29/30</b>	<b>Total</b>
Stevenage Direct Services	3,365	4,550	1,530	1,648	2,317	13,410
Housing Development	2,900	17,179	2,750	2,750	0	25,579
Finance and Estates	1,132	2,046	0	0	0	3,178
Digital & Transformation	205	138	79	79	0	501
Regeneration	20,097	21,215	24,714	1,730	0	67,756
Communities and Neighbourhoods	1,173	690	1,540	175	0	3,578
Planning and Regulatory	809	333	55	45	0	1,242
Deferred Works Reserve	149	400	250	0	0	799
<b>Total GF Schemes</b>	<b>29,830</b>	<b>46,551</b>	<b>30,918</b>	<b>6,427</b>	<b>2,317</b>	<b>116,043</b>

- 4.3.2. Stevenage Sports & Leisure Club was approved at the October 2023 Executive and is now included in the approved programme. This £45Million project is expected to be delivered by 2028/29. The project funding is set out in the chart below.





- 4.3.3. The September MTFS report identified the revenue headroom to fund the Community and Retail assets at the Oval of £5.5Million and this is now included in the capital programme. Borrowing to fund the project of £5.5Million is spread over 2027/28 and 2028/29. The indicative annual revenue costs of the scheme include £137.5k MRP for repayment of the principal commencing in 2029/30 in the General Fund budget.
- 4.3.4. Further capital investment will be required over the medium to long term to support service delivery. Capital bids not deemed a high enough priority for funding at this stage have been listed in Appendix C to be considered for approval in future budget rounds, pending funding availability. These include “ongoing” capital investments (e.g., Fleet replacement). The funding of the medium to long term capital strategy is set out in the section 3.2, however the improved financial position of the General Fund as a result of Fair Funding has allowed for a potential £3.6Million in investment to 2029/30.

Capital Funding (Revenue)	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Total
Additional funding for capital	£1,200,000	£1,200,000	£1,200,000	£3,600,000
Growth Bids not funded	£175,000	£621,700	£140,500	£937,200

#### 4.3.5. Virements

Officers have reviewed a number of cost centre budgets and where these relate to one or similar assets and ask that approval is given to combine these as they relate to commercial property and the Business Technology Centre. The detail of these is set out in Appendix B. This amalgamation will help budget managers manage delivery of approved projects.

- 4.3.6. The Deferred Works Reserve, after the inclusion of growth above will have a total budget of £799K by 2027/28. This budget is for any health & safety emergency works that may arise after the budgets are agreed at Council in February, and for works arising as a result of condition surveys including at BTC (£150k) and for



other property assets (£250k 2027/28). An assessment of the level of contingency required and the level of unused Capital Resources will be re-assessed and included in the February 2026 Capital Strategy.

#### 4.4. Capital Resources for the Revised General Fund Capital Strategy, including proposed Growth

- 4.4.1. The projected resources used to fund the Capital Strategy are summarised in the table below.

<b>Table 4: Revised Capital Programme Resourcing including Proposed Growth £000</b>							
	<b>25/26</b>	<b>26/27</b>	<b>27/28</b>	<b>28/29</b>	<b>29/30</b>	<b>Total (£000)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Capital Receipts	5,463	8,910	19,539	530	900	35,342	31
Grants and other contributions	13,580	20,838	23	28	5	34,474	29
RCCO and Revenue Reserves	1,125	2,006	1,273	1,070	31	5,505	5
Capital Reserve	116	338	105	133	0	692	<1
CIL	109	4,957	1,138	1,730	0	7,934	7
Borrowing	9,437	9,502	8,840	2,936	1,381	32,096	28
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>29,830</b>	<b>46,551</b>	<b>30,918</b>	<b>6,427</b>	<b>2,317</b>	<b>116,043</b>	<b>100</b>

- 4.4.2. The total borrowing recommended of £32Million includes £16Million of short term borrowing for SG1 Joint Venture, garage improvements and Housing Development schemes the latter scheduled to be repaid by 2027/28 using capital receipts profiled to be received by that year. The remaining balance includes £6Million for the new leisure centre, £5.5Million for the Oval commercial and retail development, further Garage Improvements and Housing Development schemes including through the Wholly Owned Company (WOC). The borrowing is repaid through a minimum revenue contribution (MRP) from the General Fund (see also section 4.7).
- 4.4.3. The use of capital receipts is dependent on delivery of the disposal sites to the market. Assuming that all the General Fund Growth Bids in Appendix A are approved. Ring-fenced Town Centre Transformation and SG1 receipts are restricted.
- 4.4.4. The use of revenue and revenue reserve in the Strategy totals £5.505Million, including -
- £3.6Million proposed use of General Fund reserves for growth
  - £500K of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funding for two freighters as set out in the Draft General Fund report
  - £719K revenue grant – for flat block recycling



#### 4.5. Capital Receipts Review Update

- 4.5.1. The current position is detailed below now includes ring fenced capital receipts allocated to part fund the leisure centre (£22Million) across 2027-2029.
- 4.5.2. Anticipated receipts from Kenilworth phase II have now been slipped a year into 2027/28 (£6Million). This will delay the associated re-financing of internal general fund borrowing by a year.
- 4.5.3. Garage sales of £1.35Million forecast to be received from 2027/28 to 2028/29 have been revised down to £1.1Million with only £200k expected in 2027/28 rather than the original £700k forecast when the Garage improvement programme was approved. Receipts of £300k per annum from 2028/29 to 2030/31 are also uncertain. This change has resulted in planned borrowing for the scheme of £3.2Million being brought forward to 2026/27 resulting in higher borrowing costs.
- 4.5.4. Forecasts are based on best information available at the time the report is written.

Table 5: Capital Receipts £000	Previous Forecast	Revised Forecast	Variance
<b>Capital Receipts (GF)</b>			
Year 2025/26 Forecast	2,184	2,058	(126)
Year 2026/27 Forecast	9,493	3,560	(5,933)
Year 2027/28 Forecast	19,276	36,314	17,038
Year 2028/29 Forecast	-	11,568	11,568
<b>Total Capital Receipts (GF)</b>	<b>30,953</b>	<b>53,500</b>	<b>28,606</b>

#### 4.6. Community Infrastructure, Biodiversity Net Gain and S106 Update

- 4.6.1. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), introduced under the Planning Act 2008 and implemented by the Council in April 2020, remains a vital funding mechanism for delivering both strategic and neighbourhood priorities. To date, £5Million of Strategic CIL has been committed to the Sports and Leisure Hub and, where applicable, the Public Sector Hub. In addition, Neighbourhood CIL contributions of £97k per annum have supported the Community Climate Change budget, enabling wards to deliver local climate initiatives.
- 4.6.2. It is proposed that £225k of CIL funding, supplemented by £30k from Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) contributions (£112.5k in 2025/26 and £142.5k in 2026/27) be allocated to deliver projects aligned with the Council's Climate Action Plan, Green Space Strategy, Woodlands Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plan. These initiatives will deliver tangible benefits, including extensive tree planting, biodiversity enhancements, improved health and wellbeing outcomes, and enhancements of the public realm, reinforcing Stevenage's commitment to creating greener, healthier, and more inclusive spaces.



- 4.6.3. The current unallocated balance stands at £663k, alongside £68k in non-ringfenced BNG contributions secured prior to mandatory implementation. Officers will continue to work closely with Members to prioritise and progress future investments.
- 4.6.4. The council holds £1.725Million in Section 106 (S106) contributions as at 22 December 2025. Of these contributions, £1.2Million is already accounted for in the Capital programme (£553K contributing to the funding of Sports and Leisure Hub (in addition to CIL above), £211k for cycling infrastructure and £123k funding Play Area Improvements). A further £516k is earmarked for sports including at the new country park or used to support the Leisure Hub. The remaining ring fenced contributions include those for affordable housing £69k and biodiversity projects £186k. In many cases the planning legal agreements require monies to be allocated towards a specific project in a specific location. Even where the Council has more flexibility it will need to ensure any eventual projects comply with the s106 conditions of use.

#### **4.7. Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)**

- 4.7.1. MRP is applied where the council has to set aside a revenue allocation for provision of debt repayments (borrowing in the capital programme). MRP replaces other capital charges (e.g., depreciation) in the statement of accounts and has an impact on the council's bottom line. MRP will increase and decrease throughout the programme and is sensitive to both expenditure and funding changes. The council will continue to balance the use of capital receipts, internal borrowing, and external borrowing to ensure the most efficient use of resources, including the need to fund MRP.
- 4.7.2. The other main risks to the capital programme are:
- Potential for scheme overspends.
  - Potential for delay in realising capital receipts noting that £5.6Million of land/asset sales are forecast to be achieved in 2025/26 and 2026/27.
  - The deferred works budget may not be sufficient to fund any schemes not currently funded in the Strategy due to the ongoing and aforementioned fix-on-fail policy approach.
  - Potential for money spent as capital on Towns Fund projects to revert to a future revenue liability if projects do not progress to physical completion, e.g., only feasibility and early design are completed.
  - Cost volatility and increased client risk in construction projects due to the impact of cost of living, which has resulted in supply chain pressures and significant price increases across the construction sector.

#### **4.8. Other capital investment and Finance Lease**

- 4.8.1. The Council purchased several properties in the town centre to enable it to meet its SG1 regeneration aims. These properties were purchased in part using LEP funding. These properties have been purchased for regeneration purposes and therefore do not fall under the Property Investment Strategy. Prior to making these



strategic acquisitions full risk assessments were undertaken to ensure the cost of carrying these assets in the short to medium term could be met by the Council.

- 4.8.2. The 2026/27 General Fund Draft Budget Strategy includes the Council's approach to set aside money to repay the LEP loan. An initial £500k will be set aside in 2026/27 with further set asides planned for future years. This strategy can be found elsewhere in the agenda.
- 4.8.3. The Council undertook a long-term finance lease for a circa £50Million mixed development scheme on Queensway in the town centre. This is a lease arrangement and falls outside the scope of capital investment. Prior to the decision to proceed being made a risk assessment was undertaken and presented to Members. Key Officers were given training on their roles and responsibilities for the new governance arrangements associated with the Limited Liability Partnership. Performance of this asset is reported to members as part of the Group companies updates to cabinet.
- 4.8.4. External legal, financial, and commercial advice is procured to ensure the validity and viability of business cases presented to Members.

#### **4.9. De Minimis Level for Capital Expenditure 2025/26**

- 4.9.1. No change to the de-minimis expenditure limit of £10,000 per scheme is being proposed this year.

#### **4.10. Contingency Allowance**

- 4.10.1. The contingency allowance for 2025/26 is £250,000. The contingency proposed for 2026/27 remains at £250,000, for schemes requiring funding from existing capital resources. A limit of £250,000 is also set for schemes for each fund that have new resources or match funded resources identified in addition to those contained within this report. This limit applies individually to both the General Fund and the HRA. This contingency sum constitutes an upper limit on both funds within which the Cabinet can approve supplementary estimates, rather than forming part of the Council's Budget Requirement for the year.
- 4.10.2. Separate to the contingency allowance, is the delegation to Cabinet or Portfolio Lead/Leader of the Council to approve increases to the capital programme for grant funded projects, when external funding sources have been secured. Officers propose that this contingency allowance remains at £5Million where a scheme is fully funded from third party contribution/grant.

#### **4.11. Consultation**

##### **Council Financial Security Group (CFSG) 6 January 2026**

- 4.11.1. Following a review of all growth bids by Senior Leadership Team (SLT), a priority list was presented to CFSG with 27 new Growth Bids for 2026/27, these are shown in Appendix A. The scoring rationale applied to these budgets was "do not support" 0 point, "support but low priority" 1 point and support with high priority" 3 points.
- 4.11.2. At the time this report was written the meeting had not taken place. The results of the consultation will be a verbal update to members at Cabinet on 14 January 2026 and will be included in the Final Capital Strategy Report for February's Cabinet.



- 4.11.3. Cabinet is requested to consider the views of CFSG and agree to approve all 27 schemes (which SLT had supported). These have all been included within the proposed capital programme for 2026/27 (in Appendix B) and are fully funded.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1. Financial Implications**

- 5.1.1. This report is financial in nature and consequently financial implications are included in the above.

### **5.2. Legal Implications**

#### **5.2.1. Local Government Reorganisation**

Section 24 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provides the Secretary of State with powers to control financial decisions made by local authorities that are due to be abolished or reorganised under a structural changes order. Under this provision, the Secretary of State may issue a direction that prevents a relevant authority from doing any of the following without written consents: -

- Disposing of land where the consideration exceeds £100,000
- Entering into any capital contract under which the consideration payable to the relevant authority exceeds £1,000,000 or which includes a term allowing the consideration to be varied
- Using financial reserves in budget calculations under the Local Government Finance Act 1972

The direction can specify that the consent must be obtained from the Secretary of State or a designated person of an authority (e.g. a shadow executive). The timing of the direction will be determined by the Secretary of State but will usually be linked to the issuing of the structural change order, the indicative timeframe of which for Hertfordshire is autumn 2026.

For all disposal routes in the context of this report, the intention is for the contract for disposal to be entered into prior a Section 24 notice being issued

- 5.2.2. The legal implications for each individual scheme within the capital programme will be considered when approval is sought for that scheme. Each scheme within the capital programme will be approved in accordance with the council's constitution.

### **5.3. Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 5.3.1. None specifically in relation to this report.

### **5.4. Risk Implications**

- 5.4.1. The significant risks associated with the capital strategy are inherent within this report.
- 5.4.2. There is a risk that the value of land sales is not realised due to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis reducing demand and prices lower than anticipated as a result. In order to mitigate the impact of this, revenue underspends of up to £500k may be made available to support capital resource in the short term.



- 5.4.3. The Council manages this risk by reviewing and updating the Strategy quarterly, including resources where a sale is likely to complete. This will enable action to be taken where a receipt looks doubtful.
- 5.4.4. A significant risk exists that works deferred due to lack of resources and materials. A reasonable assessment has been made in the prioritisation process to try to keep this risk to a minimum.
- 5.4.5. The impact on the Council's medium - long term capital strategy as a result of the governments English Devolution White Paper (16 December 2024) is currently unknown. Measures include plans for new powers for mayors across strategic planning – giving them the ability to guide infrastructure and development projects across areas, housing, transport, and skills. Impacts if any, will be included in future years capital strategy documents.

## **5.5. Climate Change Implications**

- 5.5.1. In their current form the Council's buildings do not currently support the climate change ambitions in terms of energy efficiency or divestment of use of fossil fuels.
- 5.5.2. However, there is an opportunity through the local asset review programme to build in design principles to improved / future assets in terms of energy efficiency and sustainable energy sources. This should be a core principle of any future designs arising from the local asset reviews. There would be a further benefit of reduced energy costs.
- 5.5.3. The climate change agenda is far wider than the buildings the Council uses. For example, the Council is also examining the vehicle fleet and consideration will be given to reducing its carbon impact
- 5.5.4. In addition to existing assets, new buildings being planned and delivered as part of the regeneration of Stevenage – e.g., the Hub and new Leisure Centre will be designed and equipped to meet modern standards.

## **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

- BD1 Quarter 2 monitoring report (Cabinet, December 2025)
- BD2 GF MTFS (2025/26-2029/30) (Cabinet, September 2025)
- BD3 General Fund Capital Strategy Overview – Priorities Versus Funding Requirement 2023/24-2029/30 (November 2023 Executive)
- BD4 Balancing the Budget 2026/27 (Cabinet November 2025)

## **Appendices**

- A General Fund Capital Bids for consideration
- B General Fund Capital Strategy
- C Non-priority Capital Bids for note – unfunded



## STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## GF CAPITAL - PRIORITY BASED BUDGETING 2026/27 CAPITAL GROWTH BIDS (£000)

Ref No	Service	Priority	Description of Growth Proposal	Capital in 2026/27	Capital in 2027/28	Capital in 2028/29
1	Housing & Neighbourhoods	4	Upgrade / Replacement program for CCTV cameras across Stevenage	70,000	40,000	30,000
	<b>Total Housing and Neighbourhoods</b>			<b>70,000</b>	<b>40,000</b>	<b>30,000</b>
2	Estates	3	St Georges Way MSCP - Installation of lightning protection system	35,000	-	-
3	Estates	4	Homestart, 5 Bedwell Park. Repalcement flat roof.	55,000	-	-
4	Estates	4	Stock Condtiion survey	150,000	-	-
	<b>Total Estates</b>			<b>240,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
5	Planning & Regulatory	3	Parking Restriction Schemes	25,000	25,000	25,000
6	Planning & Regulatory	1	Replacing parking machines	80,000	10,000	-
7	Planning & Regulatory	4	Christmas Decorations Phased Replacement	80,000	-	-
8	Planning & Regulatory	4	Power bollards for Town Square	30,000	-	-
9	Planning & Regulatory	4	Parking Hardstandings	20,000	20,000	20,000
	<b>Total Planning &amp; Regulatory</b>			<b>235,000</b>	<b>55,000</b>	<b>45,000</b>
10	ICT	4	Tablets, Monitors, Laptop Replacement	8,460	78,960	78,960
11	ICT	4	Mobile Phone	22,560	-	-
	<b>Total ICT</b>			<b>31,020</b>	<b>78,960</b>	<b>78,960</b>
12	SDS and Leisure	3	Ridlins Atheltics - track needs replacing or lose County status	-	500,000	-
13	SDS and Leisure	4	Carpet replacement -Theatre	100,000	-	-
14	SDS and Leisure	4	Phase 2 & 3 Theatre Stage lighting	290,000	-	-
15	SDS and Leisure	1	Re Purpose Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre post opening of new centre	-	1,000,000	-
16	SDS and Leisure	4	Sound system - Theatre	-	-	145,000
17	SDS and Leisure	4	Fleet Replacement	1,195,000	230,000	393,000
18	SDS and Leisure	4	Plant Replacement	379,000	314,000	292,000
19	SDS and Leisure	4	Bin Replacement - Town Centre	35,000	-	-
20	SDS and Leisure	4	Fairlands Valley Park - new main sign	20,000	-	-
21	SDS and Leisure	1	Floodlights for Tennis Courts at Shephalbury Park	55,000	-	-
22	SDS and Leisure	4	Refurbishment of play equipment	140,000	-	-
23	SDS and Leisure	4	Shrub Bed Removal Programme	150,000	50,000	-
24	SDS and Leisure	4	Green Space Infrastructure	50,000	50,000	50,000
	<b>Total SDS and Leisure</b>			<b>2,414,000</b>	<b>2,144,000</b>	<b>880,000</b>



STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL  
GF CAPITAL - PRIORITY BASED BUDGETING 2026/27 CAPITAL GROWTH BIDS (£000)

Ref No	Service	Priority	Description of Growth Proposal	Capital in 2026/27	Capital in 2027/28	Capital in 2028/29
25	Deferred Works Reserve		BTC	150,000	-	-
26	Deferred Works Reserve		Property works arising from Stock Condition Survey	250,000	-	-
27	Deferred Works Reserve		Stock Condition Survey	-	250,000	-
	<b>Total Deferred Works Reserve</b>			<b>400,000</b>	<b>250,000</b>	<b>-</b>
	<b>Total New Capital Projects</b>			<b>3,390,020</b>	<b>2,567,960</b>	<b>1,033,960</b>



GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY

Cost Centre	Scheme	2025/26				2026/27			2027/28			2028/29	2029/30
		Actual Costs	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Draft Capital Strategy	Draft Capital Strategy
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
	<b>General Fund - Schemes</b>												
	Stevenage Direct Services	1,768,074	4,134,763	3,365,563	(769,200)	1,850,461	4,550,361	2,699,900	886,000	1,530,000	644,000	1,648,000	2,317,000
	Housing Development	147,143	4,111,538	2,900,000	(1,211,538)	15,967,281	17,178,819	1,211,538	2,750,000	2,750,000	0	2,750,000	0
	Finance and Estates	218,215	3,112,222	1,131,609	(1,980,613)	0	2,046,066	2,046,066	0	0	0	0	0
	Digital & Transformation	63,012	275,177	205,498	(69,679)	37,819	138,518	100,699	0	78,960	78,960	78,960	0
	Regeneration	11,831,231	28,032,452	20,097,388	(7,935,064)	21,149,059	21,214,521	65,462	18,153,440	24,713,593	6,560,153	1,729,711	0
	Communities and Neighbourhoods	318,712	1,172,491	1,172,491	0	155,000	690,000	535,000	0	1,540,000	1,540,000	175,000	0
	Planning and Regulatory	205,326	819,842	809,095	(10,747)	97,500	332,500	235,000	0	55,000	55,000	45,000	0
	Deferred Works Reserve	0	149,073	149,073	0	0	400,000	400,000	0	250,000	250,000	0	0
	<b>Total Schemes</b>	<b>14,551,713</b>	<b>41,807,558</b>	<b>29,830,717</b>	<b>(11,976,841)</b>	<b>39,257,120</b>	<b>46,550,785</b>	<b>7,293,665</b>	<b>21,789,440</b>	<b>30,917,553</b>	<b>9,128,113</b>	<b>6,426,671</b>	<b>2,317,000</b>
	<b>General Fund - Resources</b>												
BG902	Capital Receipts		7,171,366	4,382,860	(2,788,506)	11,816,245	5,604,926	(6,211,319)	11,665,769	1,942,960	(9,722,809)	530,000	900,000
	SG1 Receipts		823,000	823,000	0			0	0	0	0	0	0
BG905	Ringfenced receipts		293,432	257,467	(35,965)	1,140,184	3,303,625	2,163,441	0	17,595,922	17,595,922	0	0
BG904	Towns Fund		19,202,820	10,717,158	(8,485,662)	3,940,129	12,207,653	8,267,524	0	0	0	0	0
BG904	Other Grants and other contributions		2,541,012	2,469,012	(72,000)	7,642,000	7,734,000	92,000	23,000	23,000	0	28,000	5,000
BG862	S106		102,000	339,563	237,563	577,856	896,856	319,000	0	0	0	0	0
BG904	Contractors Deposits		54,644	54,644	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BG936	Priorities – Strategic CIL		0	0	0	4,824,422	4,824,422	0	1,137,671	1,137,671	0	1,729,711	0
BG936	Local – Neighbourhood CIL		109,375	109,375	0	97,500	132,500	35,000	0	0	0	0	0
BG936	Capital Reserve (Housing Receipts)		379,034	116,014	(263,020)	0	263,019	263,019	0	0	0	0	0
BG936	RCCO		803,113	747,000	(56,113)	110,000	1,464,968	1,354,968	118,000	1,273,082	1,155,082	1,069,552	31,143
BG936	Revenue Reserves		358,092	378,092	20,000	41,503	41,503	0	0	0	0	0	0
BG936	Capital Reserve (Revenue Savings)		75,281	0	(75,281)	0	75,281	75,281	0	105,000	105,000	133,000	0
	EPR						500,000	500,000			0		
	Prudential Borrowing Approved		654,018	97,000	(557,018)	3,150,250	3,585,001	434,751	8,845,000	8,839,918	(5,082)	2,936,408	1,380,857
	Short Term borrowing and funded from private sale		9,240,372	9,339,533	99,161	5,917,031	5,917,031	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Funding Gap		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total Resources (General Fund)</b>		<b>41,807,559</b>	<b>29,830,717</b>	<b>(11,976,842)</b>	<b>39,257,120</b>	<b>46,550,785</b>	<b>7,293,665</b>	<b>21,789,440</b>	<b>30,917,553</b>	<b>9,128,113</b>	<b>6,426,671</b>	<b>2,317,000</b>



## GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY

Cost Centre	Scheme	2025/26				2026/27			2027/28			2028/29	2029/30
		Actual Costs	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Draft Capital Strategy	Draft Capital Strategy
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
				0	(1)	(0)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BG902	<b>General Funds Receipts</b>												
	Unallocated B/fwd	(5,963,576)	(5,963,576)	0	0	500,667	(4,130,387)	(4,631,054)	(10,349,091)	(32,518)	10,316,574	(28,934)	(15,600)
	In Year Receipts for CAPEX	0	(2,057,488)	(2,057,488)	0	700,000	(1,375,000)	(2,075,000)	0	(216,667)	(216,667)	(216,667)	(300,000)
	In Year receipts for repay STD			0	0		(550,000)	(550,000)		(11,690,000)	(11,690,000)		
	Swingate Excess			0	0			0		0	0		
	New Garage Sales (£2250k predicted from 26/27 to 31/32 - for GIP)	0	0	0	0	(700,000)	(200,000)	500,000		(900,000)	(900,000)	(300,000)	(600,000)
	Used in Year for capital financing	7,109,085	4,382,860	(2,726,225)	0	14,047,336	5,604,926	(8,442,409)	0	1,942,960	1,942,960	530,000	900,000
	Receipts used to fund late lep grant funding 2425	(492,183)	(492,183)	0	0			0			0		
	Receipts Used to Repay ST Borrowing			0	0		617,943	617,943	0	10,867,291	10,867,291	0	
	Used to fund sg1 receipts deficit			0	0	3,182,551		(3,182,551)			0		0
	Used to repay LEP loan			0	0			0			0		
	<b>General Fund Receipts Unallocated C/fwd</b>	0	653,326	(4,130,387)	(4,783,713)	17,730,553	(32,518)	(17,763,071)	(10,349,091)	(28,934)	10,320,157	(15,600)	(15,600)
BG905	<b>Ringfenced regeneration receipts</b>												
	Unallocated B/fwd	(2,437,922)	(2,437,922)	0	0	(2,144,490)	(2,180,455)	(35,965)	(1,215,490)	(2,453,441)	(1,237,951)	(2,723,441)	(5,892,676)
	In Year Receipts			0	0	(1,350,000)	(3,576,611)	(2,226,611)	0	(17,865,922)	(17,865,922)	(3,169,235)	
	Re Boston House											0	
	Repay STB												
	Used in Year	293,432	257,467	(35,965)	0	1,140,184	3,303,625	2,163,441	0	17,595,922	17,595,922		
	<b>Reserve Unallocated C/fwd</b>	0	(2,144,490)	(2,180,455)	(35,965)	(2,354,306)	(2,453,441)	(99,135)	(1,215,490)	(2,723,441)	(1,507,951)	(5,892,676)	(5,892,676)
	<b>SG1 Receipts</b>												
	Unallocated B/fwd	451,504	451,504	0	0	1,274,504	1,274,504	0	117,943	(527,000)	(644,943)	(4,061,533)	(4,061,533)
	In Year Receipts			0	0	(1,683,561)	(1,683,561)	0	(13,259,533)	(13,259,533)	0	0	0
	GCR					(117,943)		(117,943)		0			
	Used in Year	823,000	823,000	0	0			0	9,350,000	9,725,000	375,000	0	0
	<b>Reserve Unallocated C/fwd</b>	0	1,274,504	1,274,504	0	(527,000)	(527,000)	0	(3,791,590)	(4,061,533)	(269,943)	(4,061,533)	(4,061,533)
BG904	<b>Grant Contributions Unapplied</b>												
	Unallocated B/fwd	(22,153,954)	(22,153,954)	0	0	0	(11,957,600)	(11,957,600)	0	0	0	0	0
	In Year Receipts	88,296	(3,536,643)	(3,624,939)	0	(11,582,129)	(7,984,052)	3,598,077		(23,000)	(23,000)	(28,000)	(5,000)
	Late grant funding applied to 2425 expenditure - see CRU	492,183	492,183	0	0								
	Used in Year	21,573,475	13,240,814	(8,332,662)	0	11,582,129	19,941,653	8,359,524	0	23,000	23,000	28,000	5,000
	<b>Receipts Unallocated C/fwd</b>	0	(11,957,600)	(11,957,600)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
G936 & BG937	<b>CIL</b>												
	Unallocated B/fwd	(2,936,863)	(2,936,863)	0	0	(4,255,555)	(7,491,222)	(3,235,667)	(2,745,089)	(8,400,760)	(5,655,670)	(9,891,344)	(9,871,747)
	In Year Resource	(550,000)	(550,000)	0	0	(1,202,727)	(5,866,461)	(4,663,734)	(550,000)	(7,217,445)	(6,667,445)	(1,710,114)	
	Used in Year	109,375	109,375	0	0	97,500	4,956,922	4,859,422	0	1,137,671	1,137,671	1,729,711	0
	<b>CIL C/fwd</b>	0	(3,377,488)	(3,377,488)	0	(5,360,782)	(8,400,760)	(3,039,978)	(3,295,089)	(14,480,533)	(11,185,444)	(9,871,747)	(9,871,747)
BG936	<b>Priorities – Strategic CIL BG936</b>												
	Unallocated B/fwd	(2,593,179)	(2,593,179)	0	0	(3,692,103)	(6,520,534)	(2,828,431)	(2,301,515)	(6,636,289)	(4,334,774)	(6,987,277)	(5,657,565)
	In Year Resource	(1,098,924)	(3,927,355)	(2,828,431)	0	(1,012,823)	(4,940,177)	(3,927,355)	(400,000)	(6,077,848)	(5,677,848)	(400,000)	0
	Used in Year			0	0		4,824,422	4,824,422		1,137,671	1,137,671	1,729,711	0
	<b>Strategic CIL Unallocated C/fwd</b>	0	(3,692,103)	(6,520,534)	(2,828,431)	(4,704,926)	(6,636,289)	(1,931,363)	(2,701,515)	(11,576,466)	(8,874,951)	(5,657,565)	(5,657,565)
BG937	<b>Local – Neighbourhood CIL BG937</b>												
	Unallocated B/fwd	(343,684)	(343,684)	0	0	(563,452)	(970,688)	(407,236)	(443,575)	(1,764,471)	(1,320,896)	(2,904,068)	(4,214,182)
	In Year Resource	(329,143)	(736,379)	(407,236)	0	(189,904)	(926,283)	(736,379)	(150,000)	(1,139,597)	(989,597)	(1,310,114)	
	Used in Year	109,375	109,375	0	0	97,500	132,500	35,000			0		
	<b>Neighbourhood CIL Unallocated C/fwd</b>	0	(563,452)	(970,688)	(407,236)	(655,856)	(1,764,471)	(1,108,615)	(593,575)	(2,904,068)	(2,310,493)	(4,214,182)	(4,214,182)
G903 & BG937	<b>Capital Reserve and Debt Provision Reserve</b>												



## GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY

Cost Centre	Scheme	2025/26				2026/27			2027/28			2028/29	2029/30
		Actual Costs £	Approved Budget £	Draft Capital Strategy £	Variance £	Approved Budget £	Draft Capital Strategy £	Variance £	Approved Budget £	Draft Capital Strategy £	Variance £	Draft Capital Strategy £	Draft Capital Strategy £
	Unallocated B/fwd		(75,281)	(75,281)	0	1	(588,300)	(588,301)	(569,475)	(250,000)	319,475	(145,000)	(12,000)
	In Year Resource		(379,033)	(629,033)	(250,000)	(375,280)	0	375,280	(390,518)	0	390,518	0	0
	Used in Year		454,315	116,014	(338,301)	0	338,300	338,300	0	105,000	105,000	133,000	0
	Capital Reserve Unallocated C/fwd	0	1	(588,300)	(588,301)	(375,279)	(250,000)	125,279	(959,994)	(145,000)	814,994	(12,000)	(12,000)
BG903	<b>Capital Reserve Resource BG903 Housing</b>												
	Unallocated B/fwd		0	0	0	1	(263,019)	(263,020)	(569,475)		569,475	0	0
	In Year Resource		(379,033)	(379,033)	0	(375,280)	0	375,280	(390,518)	0	390,518	0	0
	Used in Year		379,034	116,014	(263,020)	0	263,019	263,019	0	0	0	0	0
	Capital Reserve Unallocated C/fwd	0	1	(263,019)	(263,020)	(375,279)	0	375,279	(959,993)	0	959,993	0	0
BG916	<b>Capital Reserve Resource BG916 Revenue</b>												
	Unallocated B/fwd		(75,281)	(75,281)	0	0	(325,281)	(325,281)	(0)	(250,000)	(250,000)	(145,000)	(12,000)
	In Year Resource			(250,000)	(250,000)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Used in Year		75,281	0	(75,281)	0	75,281	75,281	0	105,000	105,000	133,000	0
	Capital Reserve Unallocated C/fwd	0	0	(325,281)	(325,281)	0	(250,000)	(250,000)	(0)	(145,000)	(145,000)	(12,000)	(12,000)
	<b>Stevenage Direct Services</b>												
	<b>Parks &amp; Open Spaces</b>												
KC218	Hertford Road Play Area (S106 Funded)	0	0	0	0	25,000	25,000	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC218	Valley School Playzone (s106)	0	102,000	73,000	(29,000)	0	29,000	29,000	0	0	0	0	0
KE497	Green Space Access Infrastructure	0	52,024	52,024	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE916	Flat block waste management infrastructure	21,104	18,730	18,730	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE916	Shrub bed programme	5,492	46,779	46,779	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE916	Play Area Improvement Programme	0	96,602	96,602	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE916	Pearlree skate park	57,139	96,663	96,663	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KG002	Garages (GIP)	99,864	29,870	29,870	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KG002	Garages (GIP) 10 year plan (£250k/annum)	164,349	250,000	125,000	(125,000)	250,000	383,000	133,000	266,000	266,000	0	274,000	282,000
KG002	Garages asbestos roof capital works	0	584,000	0	(584,000)	602,000	1,186,000	584,000	620,000	620,000	0	639,000	2,035,000
	<b>Vehicles, Plant, Equipment</b>												
KE497	Trade Waste Containers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Various	Vehicle/Plant replacement Programme - see Appendix 'A1 Vehicles'	1,414,560	2,082,095	2,060,295	(21,800)	947,704	953,204	5,500	0	0	0	0	0
KE925	Repair closed church wall St Nicholas church	600	0	600	600	25,757	25,157	(600)	0	0	0	0	0
KE926	roof residual waste bay Cavendish Transfer Station	(76)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE609	Fuel pumps at Cavendish Road fuel station.	0	30,000	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE609	Replacement work Cavendish Road fuel station - manhole covers	0	17,000	17,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE952	Flat block recycling (RCCO - grant funded)	5,042	719,000	719,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE930	Digital system streets and grounds services	0	10,000	0	(10,000)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Growth	Growth Bids	0	0	0	0	0	1,609,000	1,609,000	0	544,000	544,000	685,000	0
Growth	Growth Bids	0	0	0	0	0	340,000	340,000	0	100,000	100,000	50,000	0
	<b>Total Stevenage Direct Services</b>	<b>1,768,074</b>	<b>4,134,763</b>	<b>3,365,563</b>	<b>(769,200)</b>	<b>1,850,461</b>	<b>4,550,361</b>	<b>2,699,900</b>	<b>886,000</b>	<b>1,530,000</b>	<b>644,000</b>	<b>1,648,000</b>	<b>2,317,000</b>
	<b>Housing Development Scheme (Joint GF/HRA)</b>												
KG035	Kenilworth - Community Centre	0	1,211,538	0	(1,211,538)	0	1,211,538	1,211,538	0	0	0	0	0
KG032	Building Conversion New Homes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KG034	Kenilworth - Retail	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KG042	The Oval (Redevelopment)	0	1,400,000	1,400,000	0	7,600,000	7,600,000	0	2,750,000	2,750,000	0	2,750,000	0
KG036	Kenilworth - private sale (Malvern Close & Blocks A3&A6)	147,113	1,500,000	1,500,000	0	5,917,031	5,917,031	0	0	0	0	0	0
Various	<b>Housing Development Schemes (Joint GF/HRA)</b>	<b>147,143</b>	<b>4,111,538</b>	<b>2,900,000</b>	<b>(1,211,538)</b>	<b>13,517,031</b>	<b>14,728,569</b>	<b>1,211,538</b>	<b>2,750,000</b>	<b>2,750,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,750,000</b>	<b>0</b>
KG038	Marshgate Wholly Owned Housing Development Company (WOC)	0	0	0	0	2,450,250	2,450,250	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total Housing Development (including grants to Registered Providers)</b>	<b>147,143</b>	<b>4,111,538</b>	<b>2,900,000</b>	<b>(1,211,538)</b>	<b>15,967,281</b>	<b>17,178,819</b>	<b>1,211,538</b>	<b>2,750,000</b>	<b>2,750,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,750,000</b>	<b>0</b>



## GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY

Cost Centre	Scheme	2025/26				2026/27			2027/28			2028/29	2029/30
		Actual Costs	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Draft Capital Strategy	Draft Capital Strategy
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
	<b>Finance &amp; Estates</b>												
	<b>Estates</b>												
KE527	Depots: Planned Preventative Works (reroof) - construct roof over refuse bay	6,274	5,000	22,960	17,960	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE529	Community Centres Urgent and H&S Works	2,046	3,970	3,970	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE536	Multi Storey Car Park - Installation of emergency lighting	107,509	205,299	200,299	(5,000)	0	5,000	5,000	0	0	0	0	0
KE554	Bedwell Neighbourhood centre canopy repairs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE555	8-10 The glebe roof replacement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE927	Thermal Image Cameras	0	23,011	2,109	(20,902)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE928	Health and Safety Works – Cavendish Depot	10,612	699,886	29,862	(670,024)	0	670,024	670,024	0	0	0	0	0
KR167	Cavendish Road penstock valve - stops runoff going to sewage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR175	cavendish - IT server room works	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR178	Cavendish - generator	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR150	Vacant Premises	10,490	0	36,208	36,208	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR151	Daneshill: Urgent and H&S Works	3,709	48,951	48,951	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR152	BTC 2019/20 Backlog H&S Works	3,123	27,930	0	(27,930)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR153	BTC Urgent and H&S Works	1,692	65,780	0	(65,780)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR154	BTC Planned Works (combined)	30,598	175,855	248,565	72,710	0	216,000	216,000	0	0	0	0	0
KR155	BTC Essential works - Replace / upgrade doors, Lighting and control	0	195,000	0	(195,000)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR156	EPC Surveys	1,084	77,759	8,251	(69,508)	0	69,508	69,508	0	0	0	0	0
KR156	EPC remedials	0	209,710	0	(209,710)	0	209,710	209,710	0	0	0	0	0
KR157	Builing condition surveys	38	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR158	EV Cavendish	0	300,000	300,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR159	Cavendish Road reception access enhancement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR166	CAVENDISH ROAD MANHOLE COVERS	901	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR179	Daneshill House boilers	0	197,000	100,000	(97,000)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR180	Fry Road Nursery	0	80,000	0	(80,000)	0	80,000	80,000	0	0	0	0	0
KR181	All buildings across corporate estate	0	25,000	10,000	(15,000)	0	15,000	15,000	0	0	0	0	0
KE921	Improvement works to Hampson Park depot	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Estates Cont.</b>												
KR171	Burwell Road shops - Reroofing,	0	58,947	0	(58,947)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR173	Commercial - shop units roof works	3,425	122,179	3,424	(118,755)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR174	Commercial properties - General refurbishment	10,535	100,000	10,535	(89,465)	0	267,167	267,167	0	0	0	0	0
KR176	King George V Pavilion - Works to existing Fascia boards	20,461	20,000	20,461	461	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR916	Commercial Properties Refurbishment (MRC Programme)	5,720	359,671	86,014	(273,657)	0	273,657	273,657	0	0	0	0	0
Growth	Growth Bids	0	0	0	0	0	240,000	240,000	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total Estates</b>	<b>218,215</b>	<b>2,812,222</b>	<b>1,131,609</b>	<b>(1,869,340)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,046,066</b>	<b>2,046,066</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Total Finance &amp; Estates</b>	<b>218,215</b>	<b>2,812,222</b>	<b>1,131,609</b>	<b>(1,869,340)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,046,066</b>	<b>2,046,066</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>



GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY

Cost Centre	Scheme	2025/26				2026/27			2027/28			2028/29	2029/30
		Actual Costs	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Draft Capital Strategy	Draft Capital Strategy
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
	<b>Corporate Projects, Customer Services &amp; Technology</b>												
	<b>IT General</b>												
KS268	Infrastructure Investment	44,952	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KS318	Core ICT Equipment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KS320	Telephony Hardware Refresh 2425	0	37,819	0	(37,819)	37,819	75,638	37,819	0	0	0	0	0
KS321	VDI hosting Hardware Refresh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KS322	Hardware Replacment Program	0	175,225	175,225	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KS323	Hardware Replacment Program (HRA Element)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KS324	SBC Idox Re-Tender, and Dell Memory (RAM) for Virtual desktop	0	31,860		(31,860)	0	31,860	31,860	0	0	0	0	0
Growth	Growth bids	0		0	0		31,020	31,020	0	78,960	78,960	78,960	0
	<b>Total IT General</b>	<b>44,952</b>	<b>244,904</b>	<b>175,225</b>	<b>(69,679)</b>	<b>37,819</b>	<b>75,638</b>	<b>37,819</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>78,960</b>	<b>78,960</b>	<b>78,960</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Connected to Our Customer (CTOC)</b>												
KS274	New CRM Technology	18,060	30,273	30,273	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total CTOC</b>	<b>18,060</b>	<b>30,273</b>	<b>30,273</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Total Corporate Projects, Customer Services &amp; Technology</b>	<b>63,012</b>	<b>275,177</b>	<b>205,498</b>	<b>(69,679)</b>	<b>37,819</b>	<b>138,518</b>	<b>100,699</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>78,960</b>	<b>78,960</b>	<b>78,960</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Regeneration</b>												
KE506	Public Sector Hub	7,335	50,000	14,035	(35,965)	760,434	796,399	35,965	0	0	0	0	0
	Lease buy outs	0	0	0	0	379,750	379,750	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE504	SG1 Joint Venture	6,661,625	7,535,632	7,910,632	375,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE505	Railway MSCP	(35,980)			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE506	Stevenage Sports & Leisure Club (not TF Funded element)	0			0	16,068,746	7,830,719	(8,238,027)	18,153,440	24,713,593	6,560,153	1,729,711	0
KE507	Parkplace - works ahead of Indoor Market relocation (Boston House)	561,676	1,244,000	1,244,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Towns Fund:</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
KE538	Towns Fund	34,110	(113,817)	(113,817)	0	(88,390)	(88,390)	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE506	Stevenage Enterprise Centre	(41,320)	1,843,726	23,142	(1,820,583)	0	1,820,583	1,820,583	0	0	0	0	0
KE507	Gunnels Wood Road Infrastructure	979,177	979,177	979,177	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE563	Marshgate Biotech	19,179	207,174	22,393	(184,781)	(34,889)	149,892	184,781	0	0	0	0	0
KE564	Stevenage Innovation & Technology Centre (SITEC)	213,006	2,789,775	1,140,982	(1,648,793)	0	1,648,793	1,648,793	0	0	0	0	0
	Old Indoor Market space - reconfiguration	0	2,000,000	2,000,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE565	New Towns Heritage Centre	0	1,500,000	0	(1,500,000)	479,820	1,979,820	1,500,000	0	0	0	0	0
KE566	Stevenage Sports & Leisure Club	1,675,627	5,744,127	3,813,169	(1,930,958)	2,966,278	4,890,661	1,924,383	0	0	0	0	0
KE567	Cycling & Pedestrian Connectivity	485,367	1,888,984	1,500,000	(388,984)	113,320	502,304	388,984	0	0	0	0	0
KE568	Diversification of Retail & Garden Square	1,271,429	1,523,282	723,282	(800,000)	302,146	1,102,146	800,000	0	0	0	0	0
KE568	Diversification of Retail & Garden Square (Boston House)		840,392	840,392	0	201,844	201,844	0	0	0	0	0	0
Various	<b>Towns Fund</b>	<b>4,636,575</b>	<b>19,202,820</b>	<b>10,928,721</b>	<b>(8,274,099)</b>	<b>3,940,129</b>	<b>12,207,653</b>	<b>8,267,524</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Total Regeneration</b>	<b>11,831,231</b>	<b>28,032,452</b>	<b>20,097,388</b>	<b>(7,935,064)</b>	<b>21,149,059</b>	<b>21,214,521</b>	<b>65,462</b>	<b>18,153,440</b>	<b>24,713,593</b>	<b>6,560,153</b>	<b>1,729,711</b>	<b>0</b>



## GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY

Cost Centre	Scheme	2025/26				2026/27			2027/28			2028/29	2029/30
		Actual Costs	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Draft Capital Strategy	Draft Capital Strategy
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
	<b>Community &amp; Neighbourhoods</b>												
KC232	SALC and the Swim Centre Urgent and H&S Works includes roof	31,502	53,181	53,181	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC242	SLL Leisure management - end of contract capital provision	10,555	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC237	Fire stopping works at SALC	0	177,819	177,819	0	120,000	120,000	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC250	Fire stopping at SALC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC238	Lift replacement at SALC	77,476	177,000	177,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC252	Lift procurement at SALC	1,850	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC240	Replacement Camera programme	6,072	15,052	15,052	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC052	Shephalbury Park	3,950	10,600	10,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC236	Ridlins Athletics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE917	Ridlins Athletics Facility (boilers)	11,366	80,000	80,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC243	Leisure roof works	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC245	Toilets at TVP	0	31,887	31,887	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC246	Aqua Park - Rubber crumb surface replacement	0	0	0	0	35,000	35,000	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC247	Lighting of clock tower - permanent install	60,000	60,000	60,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC253	Sailing Centre	2,900	5,052	5,052	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE118	Lighting Desk SALC - Equipmt & Tools	800	215,000	215,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE616	Operational Plant	110,229	105,000	105,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC194	CCTV Upgrade	0	159,900	159,900	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE054	New pumps/aerators to FVP lakes	0	12,000	12,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC193	Golf course works	2,012	60,000	60,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Padel Courts	0	10,000	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC210	Riddlins Track Works	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Growth	Growth bids	0	0	0	0	0	465,000	465,000		1,500,000	1,500,000	145,000	0
Growth	Growth bids						70,000	70,000		40,000	40,000	30,000	0
	<b>Total Community &amp; Neighbourhoods</b>	<b>318,712</b>	<b>1,172,491</b>	<b>1,172,491</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>155,000</b>	<b>690,000</b>	<b>535,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,540,000</b>	<b>1,540,000</b>	<b>175,000</b>	<b>0</b>



## GENERAL FUND CAPITAL STRATEGY

Cost Centre	Scheme	2025/26				2026/27			2027/28			2028/29	2029/30
		Actual Costs	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Approved Budget	Draft Capital Strategy	Variance	Draft Capital Strategy	Draft Capital Strategy
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
	<b>Planning &amp; Regulatory</b>												
KC244	Community Climate Change Fund	4,659	109,375	109,375	0	97,500	97,500	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC916	Street Scene UKSPF	8,483	68,645	68,645	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC917	St Georges MSCP - conversion of store room and boiler room to office space - Argyle way ramp	30,642	37,171	31,000	(6,171)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE504	Station Ramp	775				0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE558	MSCP resurface worn stairwell floor	424	78,141	283	(77,858)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KR172	MSCP fire door replacement	141	33,133	141	(32,992)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE119	Phase 4 ENPR - Forum (Off Street Car Parks)	70,538	70,000	0	(70,000)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE120	Park Place Remedials	2,618	54,644	54,644	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE201	Hard standings	5,017	16,444	16,444	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE217	Parking Restrictions	21,403	10,000	20,000	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KE531	Workplace Travel Plan	45,601	8,563	63,563	55,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC918	MSCP Lift Reinstatement	4,849	200,000	200,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC919	Car Parks Resurfacing	5,376	140,000	140,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC920	Car Parks - Lighting Phased Replacement (2 years)	4,800	40,000	40,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC918	MSCP Painting (westgate and st george's)	0	40,000	40,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
KC918	MSCP Fire Alarm Upgrade (st george's)	0	25,000	25,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Growth	Growth bids	0		0		0	235,000	235,000		55,000	55,000	45,000	0
	<b>Total Planning &amp; Regulatory</b>	<b>205,326</b>	<b>819,842</b>	<b>809,095</b>	<b>(122,020)</b>	<b>97,500</b>	<b>332,500</b>	<b>235,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>55,000</b>	<b>55,000</b>	<b>45,000</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Deferred Works Reserve</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>149,073</b>	<b>149,073</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>400,000</b>	<b>400,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>250,000</b>	<b>250,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>



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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL  
GF CAPITAL - UNFUNDED CAPITAL GROWTH BIDS (£000)

Ref No	Head of Service	Service	Priority	Description of Growth Proposal	Capital in 2026/27	Capital in 2027/28	Capital in 2028/29	Capital in 2029/30
1	Kerry Clifford	Housing & Neighbourhoods	4.	Upgrade / Replacement program for CCTV cameras across Stevenage	-	-	-	25,000
2	Kerry Clifford	Housing & Neighbourhoods	4.	Purchase of a fully electric vehicle (EV) for the Neighbourhood Warden team, including full branding .	31,500	-	-	-
		<b>Total Housing and Neighbourhoods</b>			<b>31,500</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>25,000</b>
3	Matt Canterford	ICT	4.	VDI hardware	-	293,280	-	-
4	Matt Canterford	ICT	4.	Laptop Replacement Program	-	-	-	78,960
		<b>Total ICT</b>			<b>-</b>	<b>293,280</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>78,960</b>
5	Steve Dupoy	SDS and Leisure	4.	Theatre - Cooling and heating backstage	28,500	28,500	38,000	-
6	Steve Dupoy	SDS and Leisure	4.	Replacement of Ground Keepers Cabin	15,000	-	-	-
7	Steve Dupoy	SDS and Leisure	4.	Golf flood & erosion protection scheme	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000
8	Steve Dupoy	SDS and Leisure	4.	Ridlins infield upgrades	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
9	Steve Dupoy	SDS and Leisure	4.	Ladder beam and fly bars SALC	-	-	32,500	32,500
10	Steve Dupoy	SDS and Leisure	4.	Fleet Replacement	-	-	-	280,000
11	Steve Dupoy	SDS and Leisure	4.	Plant Replacement	-	-	-	133,000
12	Steve Dupoy	SDS and Leisure	4.	Renew theatre stage floor	-	200,000	-	-
17	Steve Dupoy	SDS and Leisure	4.	Green Space Infrastructure	-	-	-	50,000
13	Steve Dupoy	SDS and Leisure	3.	Pool & Leisure Centre works Golf and Riddlins	30,000	30,000	-	-
		<b>Total SDS and Leisure</b>			<b>143,500</b>	<b>328,500</b>	<b>140,500</b>	<b>565,500</b>
		<b>Total Individual Bids</b>			<b>175,000</b>	<b>621,780</b>	<b>140,500</b>	<b>669,460</b>



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**Meeting** Cabinet

**Portfolio Area** Leader of the Council /  
Resources & Performance

**Date** 14 January 2026



## 2025 RESIDENTS SURVEY FINDINGS

### KEY DECISION

**Authors** Daryl Jedowski, Head of Corporate Policy & Performance  
Charlotte Bott, Corporate Policy & Research Officer

**Lead Officer** Tom Pike, Chief Executive Officer

**Contact Officers** Daryl Jedowski, Head of Corporate Policy & Performance

### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the key findings from the 2025 Residents Survey, which was undertaken independently by an external research agency over a five-week period between May and June 2025. This report summarises the headline results and their implications, with the full survey report, methodology and detailed analysis set out in Appendix A.

### 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To note the results from the latest Residents Survey, set out in Appendix A.
- 2.2 To note that the results compare very favourably with both the latest national benchmark Local Government Association (LGA) Resident Satisfaction Survey and previous Stevenage Residents Surveys across a number of areas.
- 2.3 To approve the 2025 Residents Survey findings being shared with all Members through the Co-operative Neighbourhood Strategic Board in March 2026, so that the results are used to inform ongoing neighbourhood priorities.

### 3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Regular resident surveys are widely recognised as best practice for local authorities such as Stevenage Borough Council (SBC), as they provide an



essential mechanism for monitoring satisfaction levels and engagement within the community. SBC has a strong track record in this area, having conducted surveys every two years between 2009 and 2017, followed by a survey in 2021 and the most recent in 2025, which reflects a shift to a four-year cycle. These surveys are a vital resource for understanding residents' views, shaping services, and guiding resource allocation, ensuring that the community has a meaningful voice in decision-making processes.

- 3.2 The surveys cover a broad range of topics, including overall satisfaction with the local area and the Council, how informed and engaged residents feel, and their priorities for service provision. This information helps SBC to build a comprehensive picture of local sentiment and identify emerging trends or concerns. Regular surveys also enable the Council to benchmark its performance against Local Government Association (LGA) standards, providing valuable insight into how SBC compares nationally and historically. This approach not only supports continuous improvement but also demonstrates transparency and accountability to residents.
- 3.3 Beyond measuring satisfaction, the insights gained from these surveys play a critical role in shaping strategy, service delivery, and communication. Understanding how residents consume information and access services allows the Council to tailor its messaging and engagement methods, ensuring they resonate with local communities. By focusing on the priorities highlighted by residents, SBC can build trust and confidence, reinforcing the perception that residents are at the heart of decision-making. Ultimately, this process helps the Council to maintain consistent service standards while adapting to changing needs and expectations.
- 3.4 The LGA has historically carried out a triannual telephone survey on resident satisfaction with councils, with the latest available at the time of writing from October 2024 (round 39) or June 2024 (round 38), depending on the metric. This presents an opportunity to benchmark the Council's survey results against LGA data, providing valuable context and identifying trends. The October 2024 benchmarking reported some of the lowest scores since polling began in areas such as whether local councils provide value for money and the level of trust residents have in their council. Nationally, there is a clear downward trajectory in terms of resident satisfaction, highlighting the challenging circumstances that the sector faces. However, despite this national erosion, the results of Stevenage's latest residents' survey do not follow this pattern, which is a positive indicator for the Council.
- 3.5 Comparisons with LGA national polling provide context and help identify possible relationships with other variables. These benchmarks are referenced throughout this report alongside current and historic Stevenage scores to illustrate performance trends. This analysis not only updates the Council's understanding of residents' views and satisfaction levels but also informs future policy and service provision as part of the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan. It further reflects the Council's Co-operative values and commitment to shaping services through continuous engagement with residents.

## **4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND OTHER OPTIONS**

- 4.1 The Council commissioned DJS Research to deliver its 2025 Residents' Survey, after a formal procurement process. DJS Research is an LGA registered resident survey supplier, having carried out market research for a number of sectors including both central and local Government. They have a specific long-standing track record of carrying out large-scale resident surveys in Lambeth, Southwark, Surrey, Suffolk, Nottinghamshire, North Warwickshire, Reading, North Tyneside,

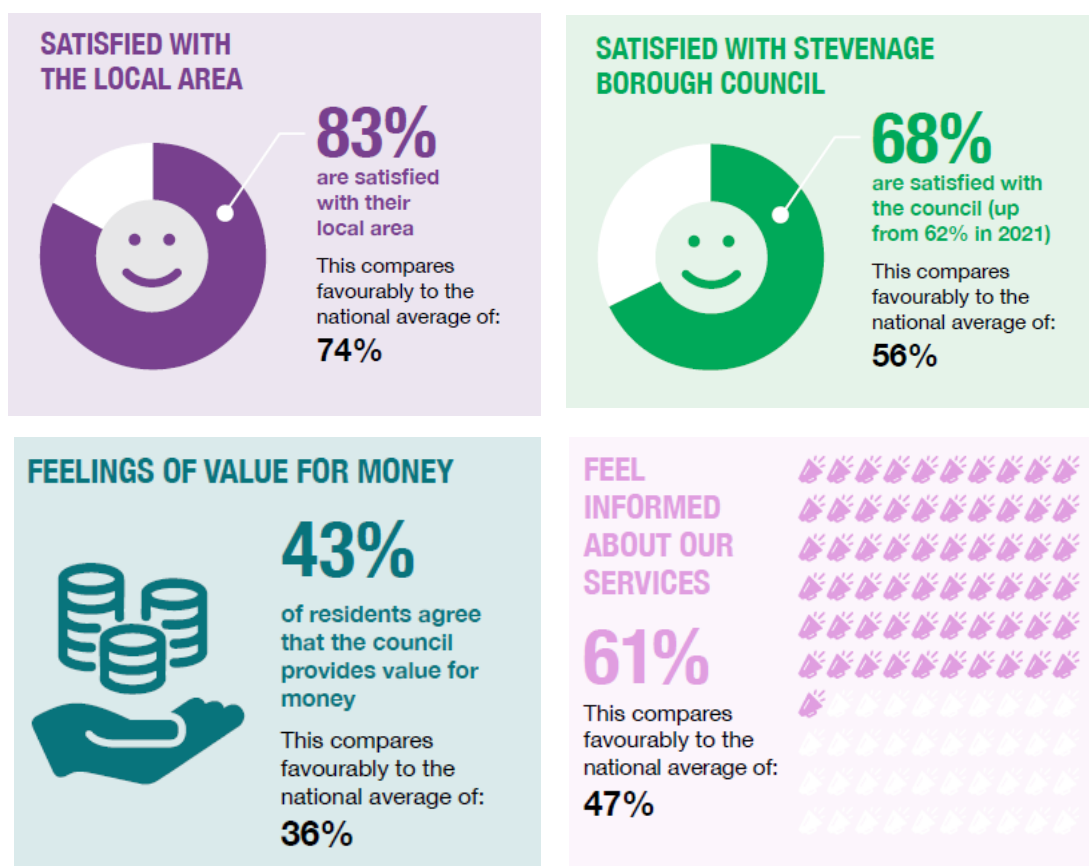


Oxfordshire, Croydon, and Herefordshire, among others in the last two years alone.

- 4.2 The survey was conducted using a mixed-method approach of telephone (CATI) and face-to-face (CAPI) interviewing, compared to 2021 when only a telephone approach was taken. This combined methodology aimed to improve survey response rates and representativeness through targeting CAPI interviews at groups that are difficult to reach via telephone (e.g. young people).
- 4.3 The sample selected for participation in this Residents Survey was weighted to the latest population statistics across demographics such as gender, age, ethnicity, disability, economic status, tenure and wards.
- 4.4 In total, 1,103 interviews were achieved across a fieldwork period of five weeks between May and June 2025.
- 4.5 Residents were asked a total of 18 questions covering a range of topics such as local area, satisfaction with the Council, safety, perceptions of value for money and resident priorities.
- 4.6 While a Residents Survey carried out every four years provides the Council's most formal and consistent overview of residents' perceptions, it sits alongside a wider set of engagement and insight gathered throughout the year. In particular, the Council's Co-operative Neighbourhoods approach and tenant involvement activity are designed to capture further feedback from residents and tenants on an ongoing basis, helping to augment and add depth to what is heard through the Residents Survey. This is complemented by programme and service-specific engagement linked to major areas of work such as housing development, regeneration and planning-related schemes. Together, this broader mix of feedback helps the Council to understand residents' experiences in more detail and shape improvements between survey cycles.
- 4.7 LGA benchmarking for residents' surveys is focused on responses from those aged 18 and over, and this report therefore reflects adult residents' views. As part of this Residents Survey exercise, and historically, the Council has not sought the views of under 18s through this method, instead prioritising more interactive and ongoing ways to engage young people. The Council is strengthening this approach further through the creation of a Youth Advisory Board, funded through the Council's partnership with Mission44. This is being co-produced with a working group of young people led by the Youth Mayor and Deputy Youth Mayor. The intention is for the Youth Advisory Board to be established as a standing forum that helps shape Council priorities and strengthens ongoing dialogue with a broader range of young people across the town.
- 4.8 The LGA periodically publishes regional level results and conducts national telephone polling three times a year. This national survey timetable has been carried out since September 2012 and measures six key indicators of resident satisfaction that councils can then utilise to place themselves within the national picture and carry out benchmarking against other local authorities. A series of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) outlined below are tracked alongside the LGA benchmark to highlight trends over time.



- 4.9 Stevenage sits comfortably above or matches the national LGA average for aspects such as satisfaction with local area; satisfaction with the Council; agreements that the Council provides value for money; feelings of safety during the day; and feeling informed about council services. Further detail and analysis on these areas is provided below.



- 4.10 A summary of headline findings is provided below, with a full independent analysis of the results set out in Appendix A.

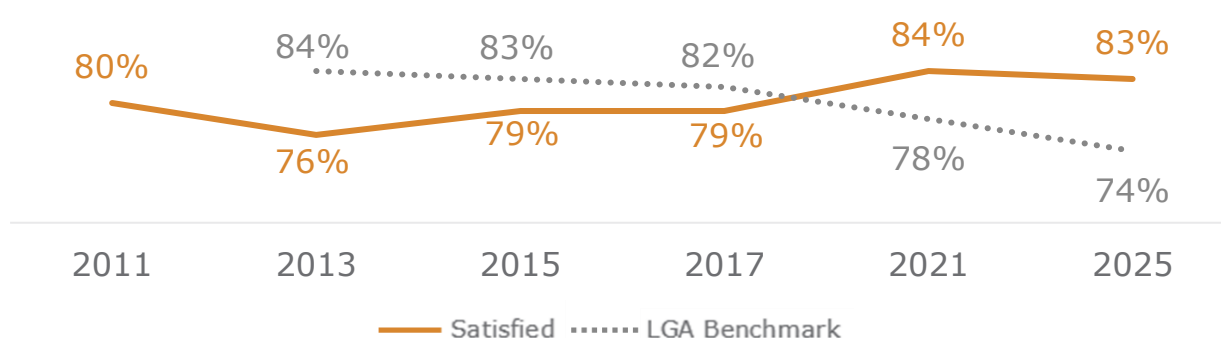
#### 4.11 Local Area, Community And Safety

- 4.11.1 Residents were asked seven questions in relation to their local area, community and safety, as follows:

No.	Question
1	Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?
2	Are there any specific issues or aspects of your local area you would like to inform us about?
3	How safe or unsafe do you feel when outside in your local area after dark?
4	How safe or unsafe do you feel when outside in your local area during the day?
5	What concerns you the most about being outside in your local area?
6	How strongly do you feel you belong to your local area?
7	To what extent do you agree or disagree that your local area is a place where people from different ethnic backgrounds get on well together?



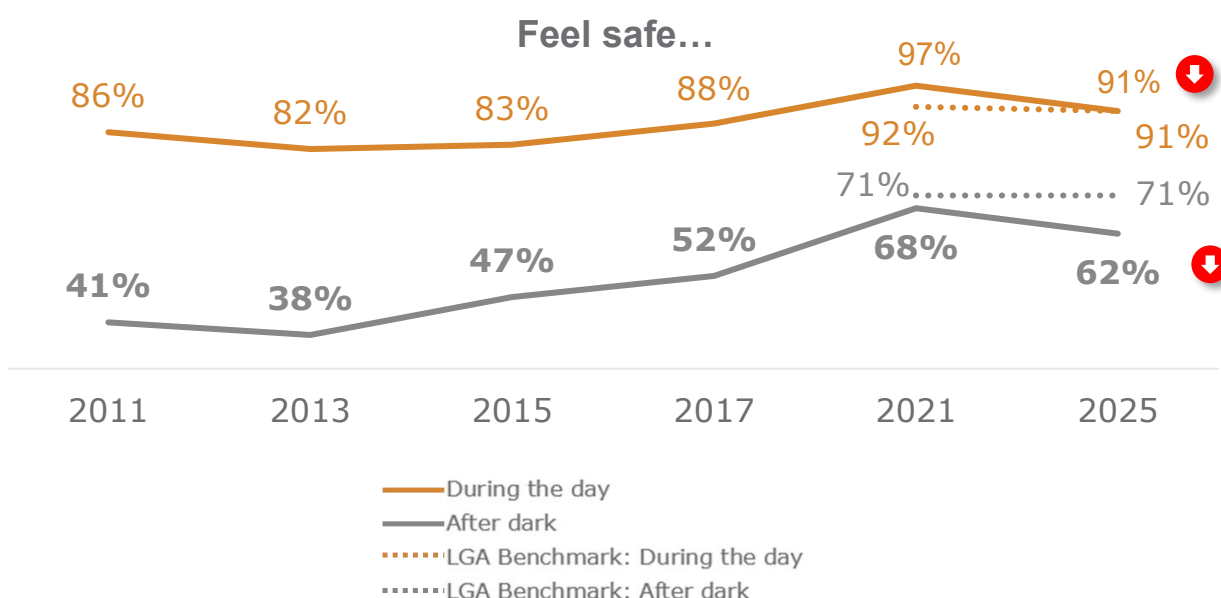
## Satisfaction with local area



4.11.2 83% of Stevenage residents are satisfied with their local area, maintaining the performance seen in 2021 (84%).

4.11.3 Over time, satisfaction with the local area in Stevenage has moved from the high-70% range into the low-80% range, while the LGA benchmark has fallen from the mid-80% range to 74% in 2025. Stevenage has therefore shifted from sitting below the national benchmark to outperforming it by 9 percentage points, at a time when satisfaction with local areas nationally has declined.

4.11.4 Residents raised a range of issues regarding their lived experience of local life. Concerns regarding crime and anti-social behaviour are most prominent (19%), followed by a general feeling that the area is suffering from decline and neglect (16%). It should be noted, however, that 16% of residents had no issues to raise, while 25% “don’t know”. The youngest cohort (18-34) are more likely to say that they have no specific issues (22%), while the oldest (65+) are more likely to flag a range of issues, including area decline (24%), parking issues (18%), and footpath condition (11%).



4.11.5 Nine in ten residents (91%) feel safe during the day; while this is in line with LGA average, it does represent a significant fall from the high seen in 2021 (97%). Meanwhile, six in ten (62%) feel safe after dark which is below both Stevenage’s 2021 score (68%) and the LGA comparator (71%). The top three concerns among those who do not feel safe outside are gangs/groups of people hanging around (32%), drug dealing/use (30%) and youth crime/disruption (28%).

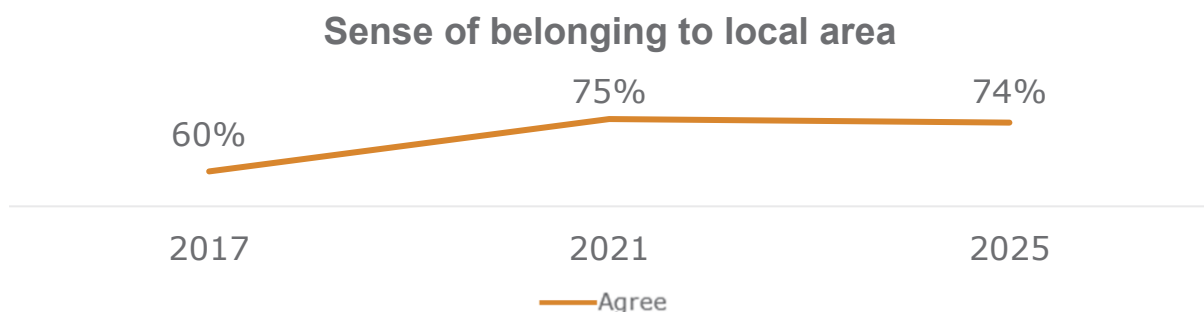
4.11.6 While the findings from this question have not improved compared to the previous Residents Survey in 2021, it is important to view these results as part



of the broader context. Firstly, it is important to note the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and consequent lockdowns that may have impacted the findings during 2021 and what may have ultimately increased perceived feelings of safety amongst residents during this time, such as residents being asked to stay at home under Health Protection Regulations. Secondly, national polling on community safety in 2023 revealed a notable contrast between urban and rural areas, with residents in urban locations expressing greater concern about crime levels, particularly anti-social behaviour (ASB). This suggests that, like other urban towns, Stevenage residents may be more likely to report lower levels of perceived safety compared to those living in rural areas. As a result of both of these factors, it is important to recognise that the findings reflect the impact of specific time-based circumstances, such as the pandemic, and the limitations of national benchmarks, which may not fully account for the unique challenges faced by urban areas like Stevenage.

4.11.7 Following the receipt of these results, targeted action has taken place with the Community Safety team to understand if there was alignment or disparity between the perceptions versus incidents of crime in Stevenage. According to LG Inform, Stevenage recorded 84.08 crimes per 1,000 people in the 12 months prior to Q2 2025, which is in line with the national average of 84.40 crimes per 1,000 people in England. So, whilst Stevenage's resident survey findings of perceptions of safety are below the LGA average, the actual recorded crime rates mirror the national picture. Further, the police recorded crime rate has been consistently lower in predominantly rural areas than in the predominantly urban areas such as Stevenage.

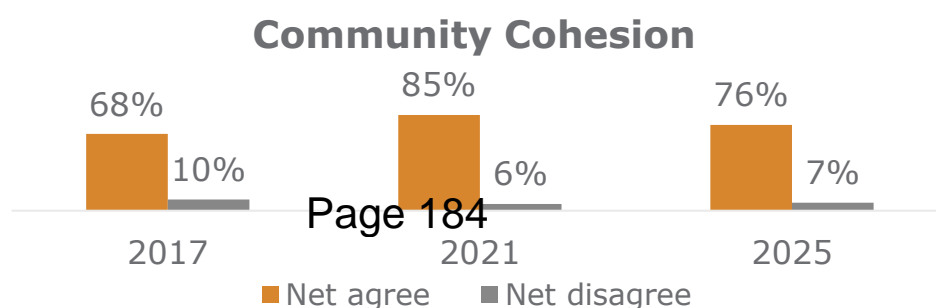
4.11.8 Further, whilst there are already dedicated programmes in place for many of the concerns residents identified through Stevenage Borough Council and partners, this information will help better allocate and align services to ultimately improve feelings of safety going forward.



4.11.9 A similar pattern also emerges in terms of sense of belonging to the local area. Like in 2021, three-quarters of residents feel either a very or fairly strong sense of belonging (74%).

4.11.10 The results for sense of belonging to local area follow a similar pattern to local area satisfaction, with overall positive sentiment matching 2021 levels despite a softening in the granular results.

4.11.11 Those aged 35-44 are more likely to feel a strong sense of belonging to the local area (82%). In contrast, those aged 45-54 are more likely to have answered not very/not at all strongly (31%).





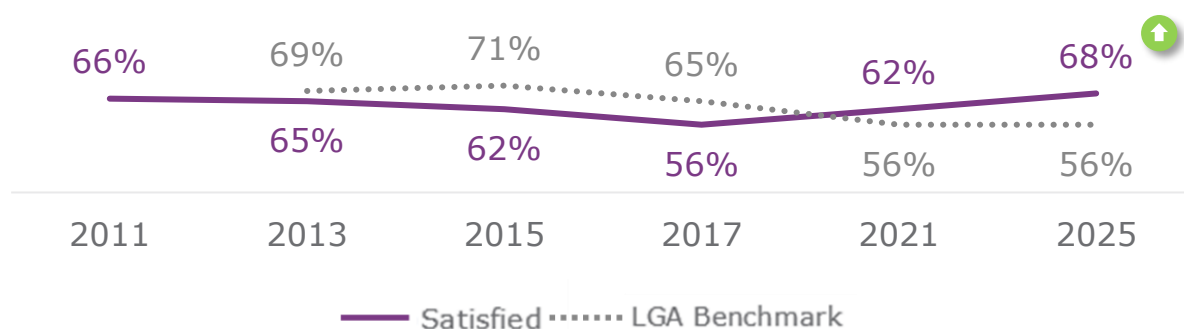
4.11.12 It was found that a strong majority of residents agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds can get along (76%). This does represent a decline compared to 2021 (85%), but this year's figure is higher than 2017 (68%).

## 4.12 The Council

4.12.1 Residents were asked nine questions in relation to Stevenage Borough Council, as follows:

No.	Question
1	Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way Stevenage Borough Council runs things?
2	To help the council understand residents' priorities in terms of the services it provides, can you please tell us which of the following areas you consider to be of importance to you?
3	Now using the same list, I would like you to tell me, of the service areas you consider to be important, can you please tell me your top three priority areas?
4	How often do you visit Stevenage Town Centre?
5	To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council Tax paid to Stevenage Borough Council provides value for money?
6	The council continues to consider efficiencies and make savings where possible, please tell us your preference of where they should do this for each of the following options by ordering them 1 to 5, when 1 is most preferred and 5 is least preferred?
7	Overall, how well informed do you think Stevenage Borough Council keeps residents informed about the services it provides?
8	During the past 12 months, how have you accessed information about the council and its services?
9	Do you have an online personal council account? If not, could you please tell us why?

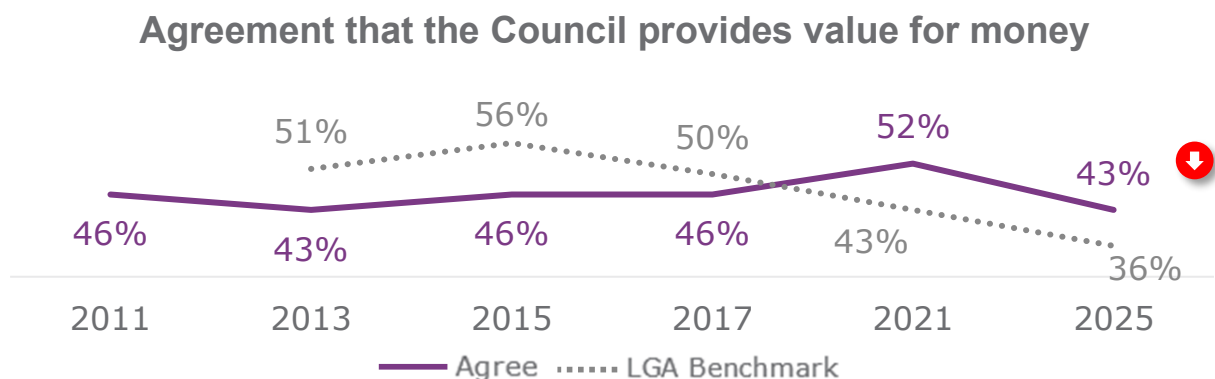
### Satisfaction with Stevenage Borough Council



4.12.2 Satisfaction with the Council has increased significantly compared to 2021, rising from 62% to 68%. The Council now stands 12 percentage points above the latest LGA benchmark score (Page 185)



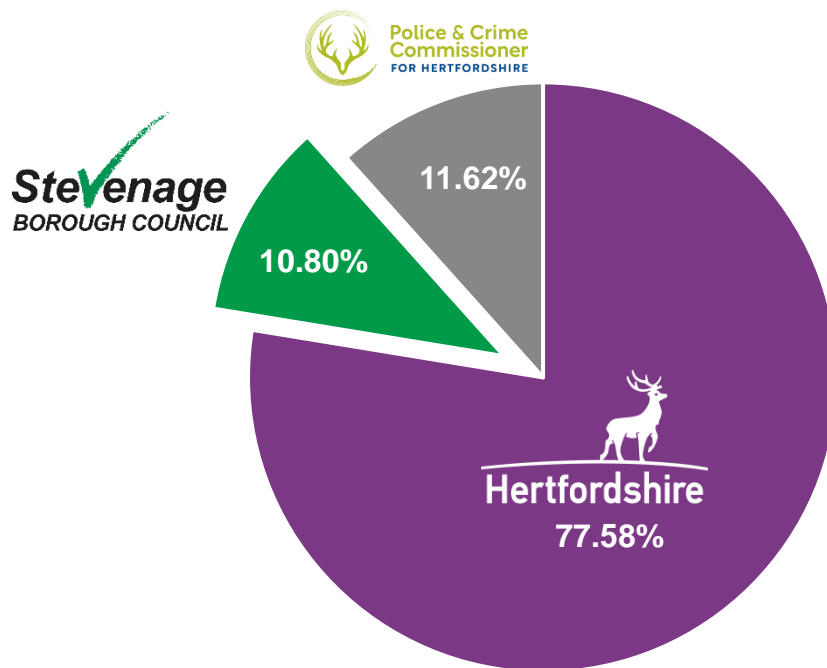
- 4.12.3 Historically, Stevenage's satisfaction scores were a few points below the national benchmark and fell to 56% in 2017, when the LGA figure was around 65%. Since then, national satisfaction with councils has fallen to 56%, while satisfaction with Stevenage Borough Council has recovered and improved to 68%. This represents a clear reversal of the previous gap and indicates a stronger relative position for Stevenage despite the continued financial pressures facing local government.
- 4.12.4 In terms of service provision, views are largely consistent with the previous survey, although there are a few notable deviations for services that are considered less important. Specifically, there have been significant upticks in the importance ratings for the enforcement of parking restrictions, arts and cultural activities, local community/voluntary groups, and town centre/leisure park regeneration. In contrast, the percentage who think efforts to reach net-zero are important has declined by 10 percentage points, although it should be noted that three-quarters of residents do still deem this to be very or fairly important.
- 4.12.5 Following on from this, residents were asked to select their top three priority services from the same list. Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour emerges as a clear priority, (47%), and this is unsurprising given it was the top theme mentioned when residents were asked about specific issues affecting their local area. The next most selected priorities are housing (33%) and clean streets (32%). The council should look to prioritise these areas in order to help improve satisfaction going forward.
- 4.12.6 There has also been an uptick in the percentage of residents who visit the city centre regularly, particularly for the frequency "at least once a week". Interestingly, the percentage who never visit the city centre has declined by 8 percentage points in this survey. Nearly a quarter of 18–44-year-olds visit the town centre every day or most days (23%). This percentage is five times higher than 45-64-year-olds and twice as high as those aged 65+.



- 4.12.7 Agreement that Stevenage Borough Council provides value for money sits at 43%, which is 7% above the LGA's national average of 36% but represents a decline from 52% from the last Residents Survey in 2021. When asked to consider ways to generate efficiencies and extra income for the Council, residents' most preferred option is to modernise services or sell more of the Council's services.
- 4.12.8 When analysing residents' views on value for money, local and national evidence suggests that perceptions of council tax are a significant factor, particularly in relation to the rate of increase and its link to funding key local services. These concerns sit within the wider context of reductions in central government funding to local authorities since 2010, which has increased reliance on council tax to support essential statutory services. To help manage affordability for residents most in need of support, the Council operates a Council Tax Support Scheme. Eligible working-age residents on maximum



support pay 8.5% of their council tax bill, while support for pension-age residents is delivered in line with nationally prescribed requirements, ensuring a consistent safeguard for pension-age households.



Authority	2024/25	2025/26	Cost per week	Increase	Share
Hertfordshire County Council	£1,498.45	£1,573.22	£30.25	4.99%	77.58%
Stevenage Borough Council	£212.68	£219.03	£4.21	2.99%	10.80%
Police and Crime Commissioner	£223.11	£235.56	£4.53	5.58%	11.62%
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,934.24</b>	<b>£2,027.81</b>	<b>£39.00</b>	<b>4.84%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

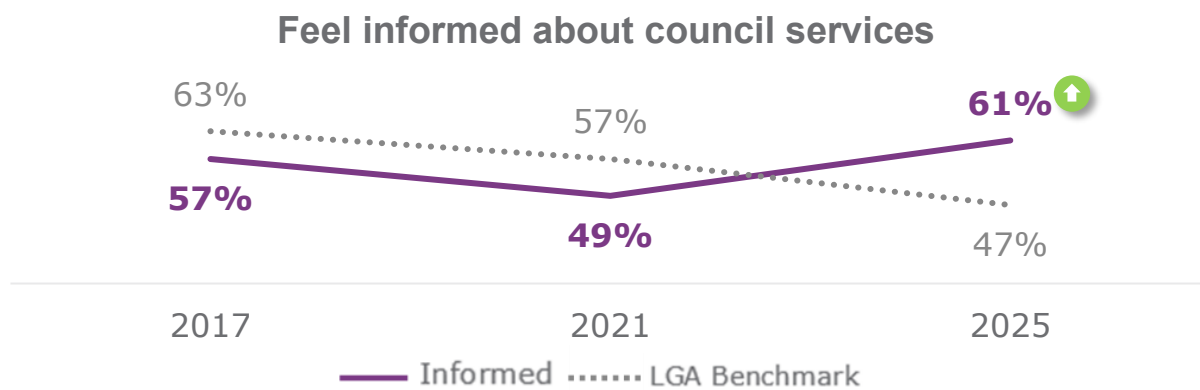
4.12.9 It is worth noting that the Council has limited control over the overall increase in council tax bills, as the majority of the charge is set by other authorities. The Borough Council element represents 10.80% of the total council tax collected and equates to £4.21 per week for residents. While the Borough Council's charge has increased by 2.99%, the larger elements of the bill relate to Hertfordshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner, meaning the overall change experienced by residents is often driven by factors beyond the Council's direct control.

4.12.10 Over the longer term, residents' views of whether the Council provides value for money have been relatively stable, at or around the current findings. However, prior to 2017 these scores sat several percentage points below the LGA national benchmark. Only in 2021 and 2025 have Stevenage's value for money ratings moved above the national picture, at a time when national perceptions have fallen sharply from 50% in 2017 to 36% in 2025. This suggests that, while there is more to do, the Council has strengthened its relative position on value for money compared with other areas.

4.12.11 As the Council strives to provide the most efficient services for its residents in the context of sustained financial pressures on local government and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, these results will be utilised to explore where additional productivity gains and income can be generated. The perceptions of value for money findings have been shared with the Council's Resources Portfolio Holder, Section 107 Officer, the Strategic Leadership Team



and Finance team to determine what can be specifically targeted and actioned to help increase perceived value for money moving forward.



4.12.12 There has also been an improvement in the percentage who feel informed about council services. In 2021, just under half (49%) felt very or fairly well informed, but this has increased to three in five (61%). This means that Stevenage is comfortably ahead of the LGA benchmark (47%).

4.12.13 Residents' top way of accessing information is accessing the council website, with nearly half of residents indicating that they do this (48%). Around two-thirds of residents do not have an online personal council account, and a quarter of this group say this is because they were unaware of it, rising to a third for those aged 45+.

4.12.14 Whilst this is largely good news in terms of greater engagement with residents, considerably above the national average, these results were shared directly with the Council's Communications team to reinforce the success of the actions they are currently taking but also the necessity for increased exposure of online council website accounts. These findings will help to continue to drive forward the perception that Stevenage Borough Council is consistently and effectively communicating and engaging with its residents.

### 4.13 Local Government Reorganisation & Devolution

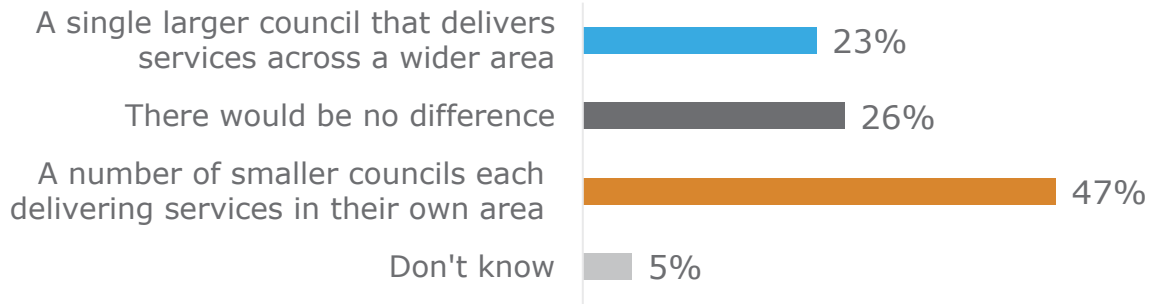
4.13.1 Residents were asked two questions in relation to Local Government Reorganisation & Devolution, as follows:

No.	Question
1	Stevenage Borough Council currently provides local services such as waste collection, leisure, planning, and housing. In your view, which of the following approaches would be more effective for maintaining the quality of these services?
2	The government is proposing to delegate further powers to local government. This is often referred to as devolution. What would be your top three priorities to improve your area through Devolution?

4.13.2 When asked to consider the ideal council size for maintaining the quality of services, a plurality of residents opt for a smaller council (47%). This is around double the percentage who would prefer a larger council (23%). Meanwhile, 26% do not feel like it would make a difference one way or the other.



## Ideal Council Size



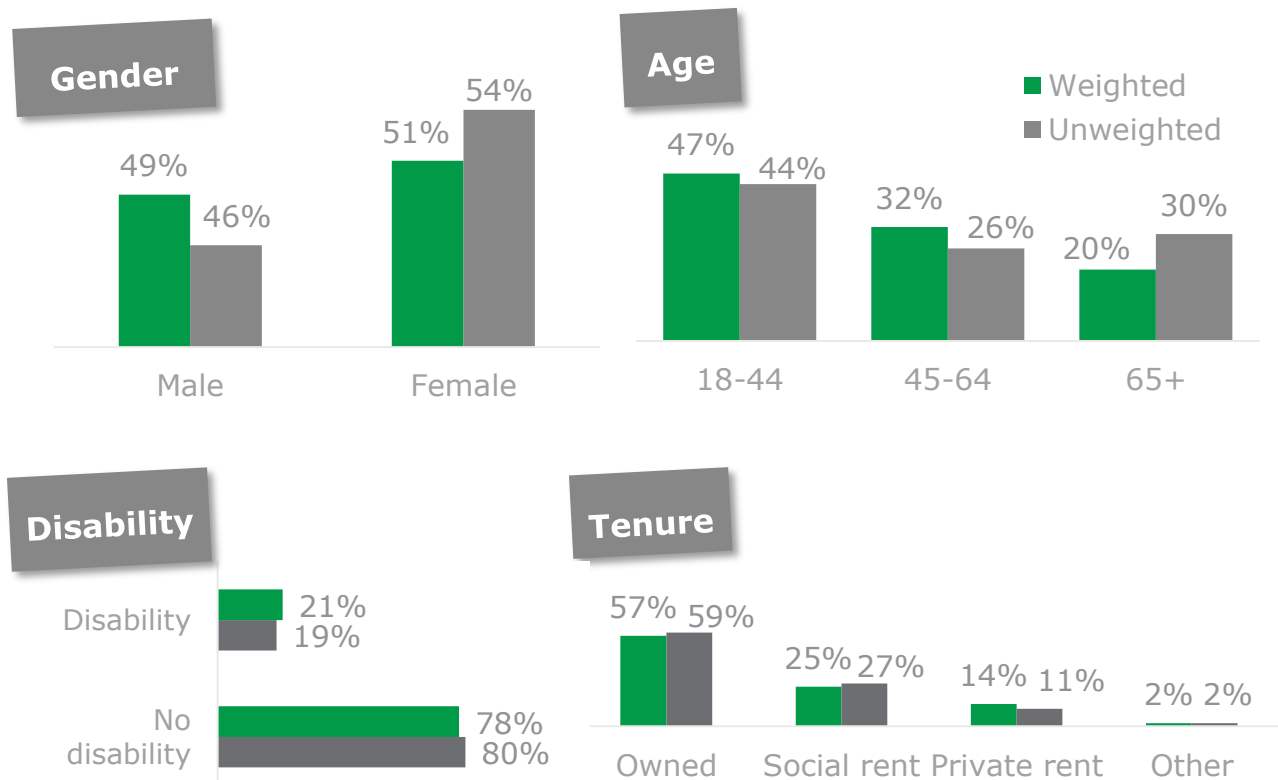
4.13.3 In terms of devolution, residents are most eager to see progress in terms of affordable housing and planning (59%), followed by health and public safety (52%). Traffic and highways (44%) and skills and employment support (41%) also represent priorities for a substantial number of residents.

4.13.4 Housing and planning are especially salient to those aged 18-44, with 67% selecting housing as a top priority for devolution.

4.13.5 These findings were used to help inform Hertfordshire's joint Local Government Reorganisation Proposal for either two, three or four Unitary Authorities for Hertfordshire. The joint proposal outlines how local government will be reshaped to deliver simple, accountable, and sustainable services for all residents.

## 4.14 Respondent Profile

4.14.1 As referenced previously, the sample selected for participation in this Residents Survey was weighted to the latest population statistics across demographics such as gender, age, ethnicity, disability, economic status, tenure and wards. Therefore, the results that are reported as part of this survey and linked report are the weighted figures, so the published outputs already adjust for this using the latest population statistics. A few examples are shown below, with a full breakdown available in the linked full findings report. Please note that figures may not sum to 100% due to refusals (not charted) or rounding:





- 4.14.2 A stratified random quota sampling approach was adopted for the CATI (telephone) component of the research and in-street interviewing was used for the CAPI (face-to-face) element.
- 4.14.3 In total, 1,103 interviews were achieved across a fieldwork period of five weeks between May and June 2025; 623 interviews via CATI and 480 via CAPI. This is above the sample size recommended by LGA guidance as an acceptable level of accuracy for a survey of this nature. Further, the robustness of the sample has been strengthened since the last residents survey, as only 764 interviews were carried out in 2021, compared to 1,103 interviews in 2025.
- 4.14.4 A sample size of 1,103 for the survey gives a sampling error of +/-2.9% based on a statistic of 50% at the 95% confidence interval. A 95% confidence level with a sample of around 1,000 respondents is widely regarded as an industry standard for robust, large scale resident surveys in local government. In practice, this means that if the survey reports that 50% of respondents hold a particular view, there is 95% confidence that the true proportion among all adult residents lies between 47.1% and 52.9%.
- 4.14.5 There has been a national shift in the preferred survey fieldwork methodology, with more organisations using face-to-face methods to improve representation in younger age groups, where telephone-only approaches often struggle. This approach was taken during the 2025 Residents Survey, in contrast to previous iterations when telephone-only approaches were taken. Whilst this does not alter the positivity of the responses, it simply makes it easier to capture a representative sample size in those younger age groups.

## **4.15 Next Steps**

- 4.15.1 Following the receipt of the findings of the 2025 Resident Survey, follow up analysis was undertaken with specific teams throughout the remainder of the 2025/26 financial year.
- 4.15.2 Targeted action was undertaken to both champion the Council's successes such as maintaining high satisfaction levels despite the erosion of the LGA benchmarking figures, and address the challenge of the national mood shifting in terms of value for money and perceptions of safety. Collaboration with relevant teams such as Housing & Neighbourhoods, Community Safety, Communications, Business Change & Digital, Finance and Stevenage Direct Services has taken place to specifically dissect the key findings linked to their associated areas.
- 4.15.3 The key findings will be used as an evidence base to help target interventions for the 'Heart of the Town' initiative, inform prioritisation as part of the upcoming 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the town celebrations, and feed into Local Government Reorganisation transition planning going forward.
- 4.15.4 They will also be utilised to inform the prioritisation and utilisation of the Community Infrastructure Levy as the Council delivers new development and infrastructure across the town. It will also feed into future budget decisions regarding the prioritisation of savings.
- 4.15.5 Further, as part of the Co-operative Neighbourhood Strategic Board in March, a presentation to all Members will be delivered to ensure widespread dissemination of these findings and continued targeted action.
- 4.15.6 Triangulation with the newly released Indices of Multiple Deprivation will also be undertaken to align national data with resident feedback and target combined priorities.



## **5 IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1.1 The Council historically budgets for the Residents Survey through the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 5.1.2 The implementation of any actions from recommendations in the Residents Survey will be the responsibility of each service area and any associated costs arising will be met from within their existing resources.

### **5.2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.2.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. However, legal advice will be provided, whenever required, in relation to the Council's responses to the residents' feedback.

### **5.3 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.3.1 SBC and DJS Research ensured the survey design, execution and analysis considered the needs and experiences of residents across all protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010.
- 5.3.2 A representative sample of the borough, target quotas and weighting were used based on age, gender, ethnicity, economic status, disability and tenure. Weighting was applied where necessary to ensure the final results were representative of the adult population of Stevenage.

### **5.4 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.4.1 There are no direct significant risks to the council in agreeing the recommendation(s).
- 5.4.2 The Council has an embedded approach to risk management that mitigates any adverse effect on delivery of the Council's objectives and internal control processes and provides good governance assurance.

### **5.5 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.5.1 The Council declared a climate change emergency in June 2019 with a resolution to work towards a target of achieving net zero emissions by 2030. This report includes findings relating to climate change and will be used to help inform future decision making.

## **6 APPENDICES / SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS**

- Appendix A - Residents Survey 2025 Findings Report



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# Residents Survey 2025

Stevenage Borough Council

January 2026



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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Stevenage Borough Council commissioned DJS Research to deliver its 2025 Residents' Survey through a mixed-method approach of telephone (CATI) and face-to-face (CAPI). In total, 1,103 interviews were conducted from May-June 2025. The findings of these interviews are summarised below and in the infographic found at Appendix A.

## Local Area, Community And Safety

83% of residents are satisfied with their local area, maintaining the performance seen in 2021 (84%). Encouragingly, Stevenage outperforms the LGA average by 9% points. A similar pattern also emerges in terms of sense of belonging to the local area. Like in 2021, three-quarters of residents feel either a very or fairly strong sense of belonging (74%), and the LGA average is comfortably outperformed – this time by 15% points.

Nine in ten residents (91%) feel safe during the day; while this is in line with LGA average, it does represent a significant fall from the high seen in 2021 (97%). Meanwhile, six in ten (62%) feel safe after dark which is below both Stevenage's 2021 score (68%) and the LGA comparator (71%). Concerningly, three in ten women say that they feel unsafe at night (31%). The top three concerns among those who do not feel safe outside are gangs/groups of people hanging around (32%), drug dealing/use (30%) and youth crime/disruption (28%).

Finally, a strong majority of residents agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds can get along (76%). This does represent a decline compared to 2021 (85%), but this year's figure is higher than 2017 (68%).

## The Council

Satisfaction with the council has increased significantly compared to 2021, rising from 62% to 68%. Again, the council comfortably outperforms the latest LGA score (56%).

Less positively, perceptions of value for money have declined by 9% points compared to 2021 (43% cf. 52%), although this is still above the LGA's average (36%). When asked to consider ways to generate efficiencies and extra income for the council, residents' most preferred option is to modernise services or sell more of the council's services.

There has also been an improvement in the percentage who feel informed about council services. In 2021, just under half (49%) felt very or fairly well informed, but this has increased to three in five (61%). This means that Stevenage is comfortably ahead of the LGA benchmark (47%).

Residents' top way of accessing information is accessing the council website, with nearly half of residents indicating that they do this (48%). Around two-thirds of residents do not have an online personal council account, and a quarter of this group say this is because they were unaware of it, rising to a third for those aged 45+. Targeted comms could promote the benefits of this and encourage greater take-up.

## Local Government Reorganisation & Devolution

When asked to consider the ideal council size for maintaining the quality of services, a plurality residents opt for a smaller council (47%). This is around double the percentage who would prefer



a larger council (23%). Meanwhile, 26% do not feel like it would make a difference one way or the other.

In terms of devolution, residents are most eager to see progress in terms of affordable housing and planning (59%), followed by health and public safety (52%). Traffic and highways (44%) and skills and employment support (41%) also represent priorities for a substantial number of residents. Housing and planning is especially salient to those aged 18-44, with 67% selecting housing as a top priority for devolution.

## Background & Methodology

Stevenage Borough Council commissioned DJS Research to deliver its 2025 Residents' Survey.

Following the most recent residents' survey, conducted by telephone in 2021, the 2025 Residents Survey was conducted using a mixed-method approach of telephone (CATI) and face-to-face (CAPI). This combined methodology aimed to improve survey response rates and representativeness through targeting CAPI interviews at groups that are difficult to reach via telephone (e.g. young people).

In total, 1,103 interviews were achieved across a fieldwork period of 5 weeks from 06 May to 16 June 2025, split as follows. A total of 623 interviews were conducted via CATI and 480 via CAPI. A full breakdown of the sample split by gender, age, ethnicity, disability, tenure, economic status and ward can be found at Appendix B.

Residents were asked a total of 18 questions covering a range of topics such as satisfaction with the local area, council, safety, perceptions of value for money and resident priorities. The complete question set can be found at Appendix C.

### Sampling

A stratified random quota sampling approach was adopted for the CATI component of the research, whereby a random sample of households were purchased from a sample sourcing agency, ensuring a proportionate spread of contacts within each of the borough's wards. In addition to this, lifestyle contacts were used to target specific groups. A mix of landline and mobile numbers were used.

For the CAPI element, in-street interviewing was used. Shifts took place in a variety of locations both within and outside of the town centre.

To give a representative sample of the borough, target quotas and weighting were used based on age, gender, ethnicity, economic status, disability and tenure. Weighting has been applied where necessary to ensure the final results are representative of the adult population of Stevenage

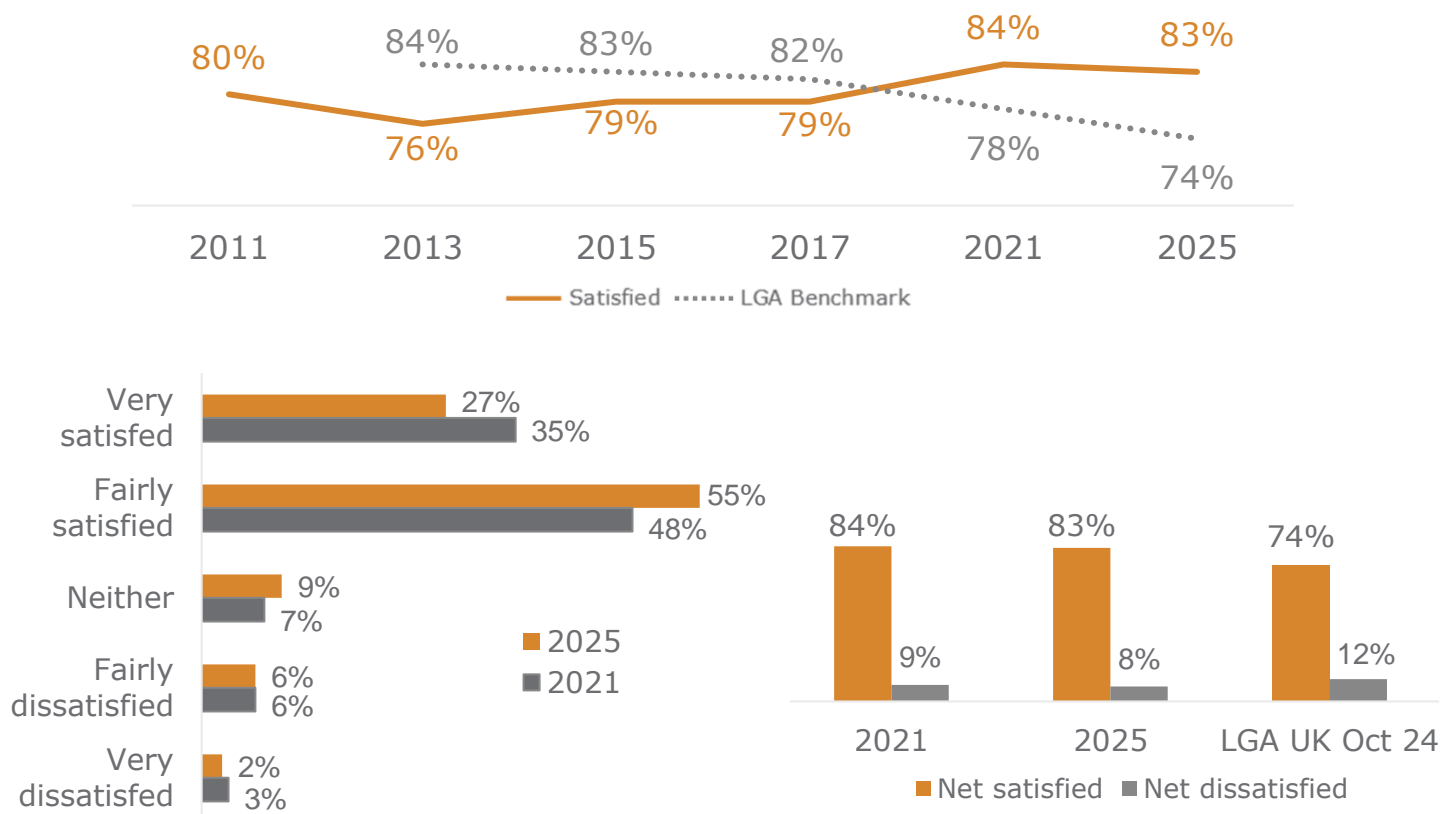
### Statistical reliability

A sample size of 1,103 for the adult survey gives a sampling error of +/-2.9% based on a statistic of 50% at the 95% confidence interval. For example, this means that if we found a score of 50% within the survey, we can be 95% confident that this figure lies between 47.1% and 52.9% had we interviewed every resident in Stevenage.



# Local Area, Community & Safety

## Satisfaction with Local Area



Overall satisfaction remains strong and is comfortably above the LGA average (+9% points). However, satisfaction has softened slightly, demonstrated by a reduction in those who are 'very' satisfied. Those in the least deprived IMD quintile report higher than average satisfaction (92%). The youngest age group (18-34s) are significantly less likely to be satisfied than average (79%). Those who agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get along are nearly twice as likely to be satisfied compared to those who disagree (87% cf. 48%).

## Issues or Aspects of Local Area

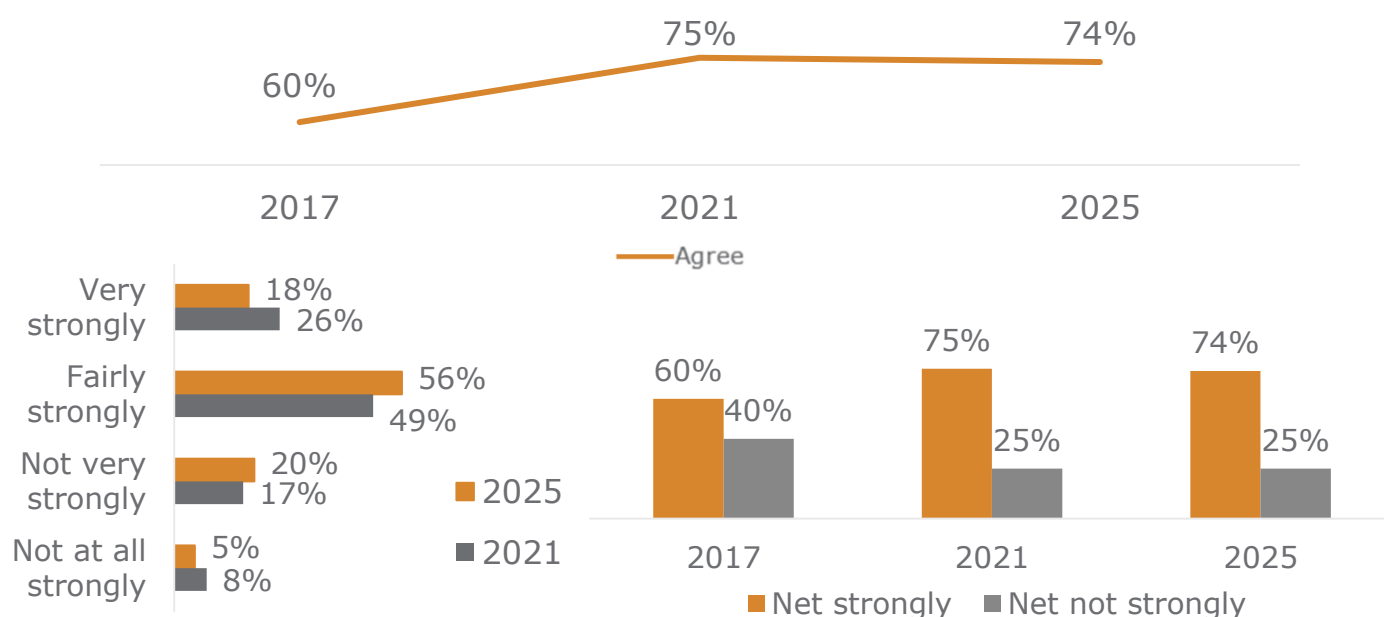




Residents spontaneously raised a range of issues regarding their lived experience of local life. Concerns regarding crime and anti-social behaviour are most prominent (19%), followed by a general feeling that the area is suffering from decline and neglect (16%). It should be noted, however, that 16% of residents had no issues to raise, while 25% “don’t know”.

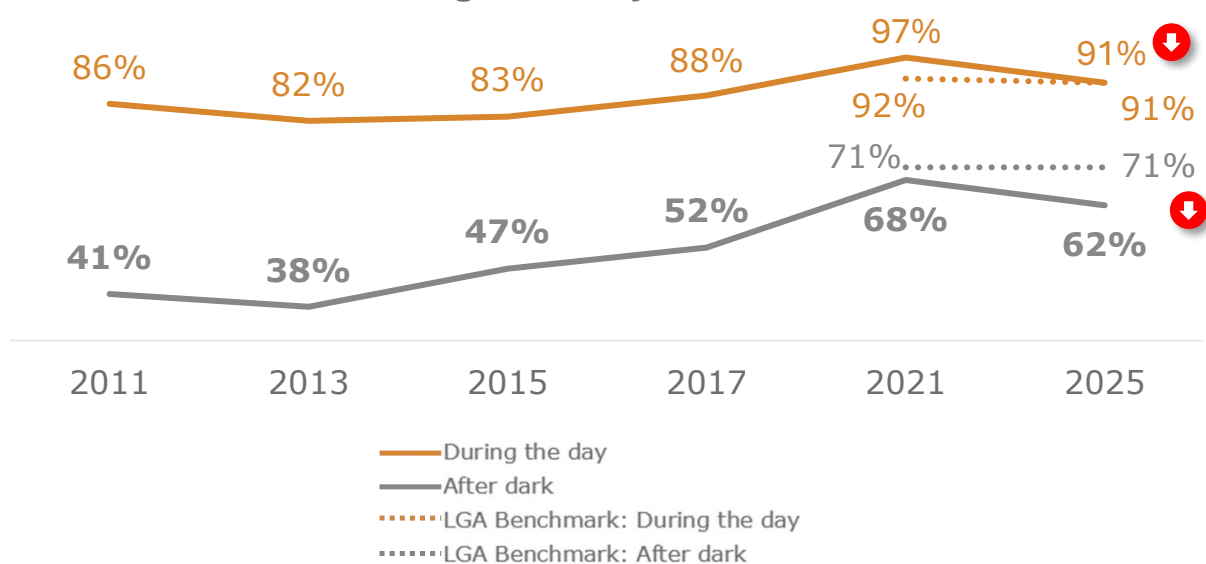
The youngest cohort (18-34) are more likely to say that they have no specific issues (22%), while the oldest (65+) are more likely to flag a range of issues, including area decline (24%), parking issues (18%), and footpath condition (11%).

### Sense of Belonging to Local Area

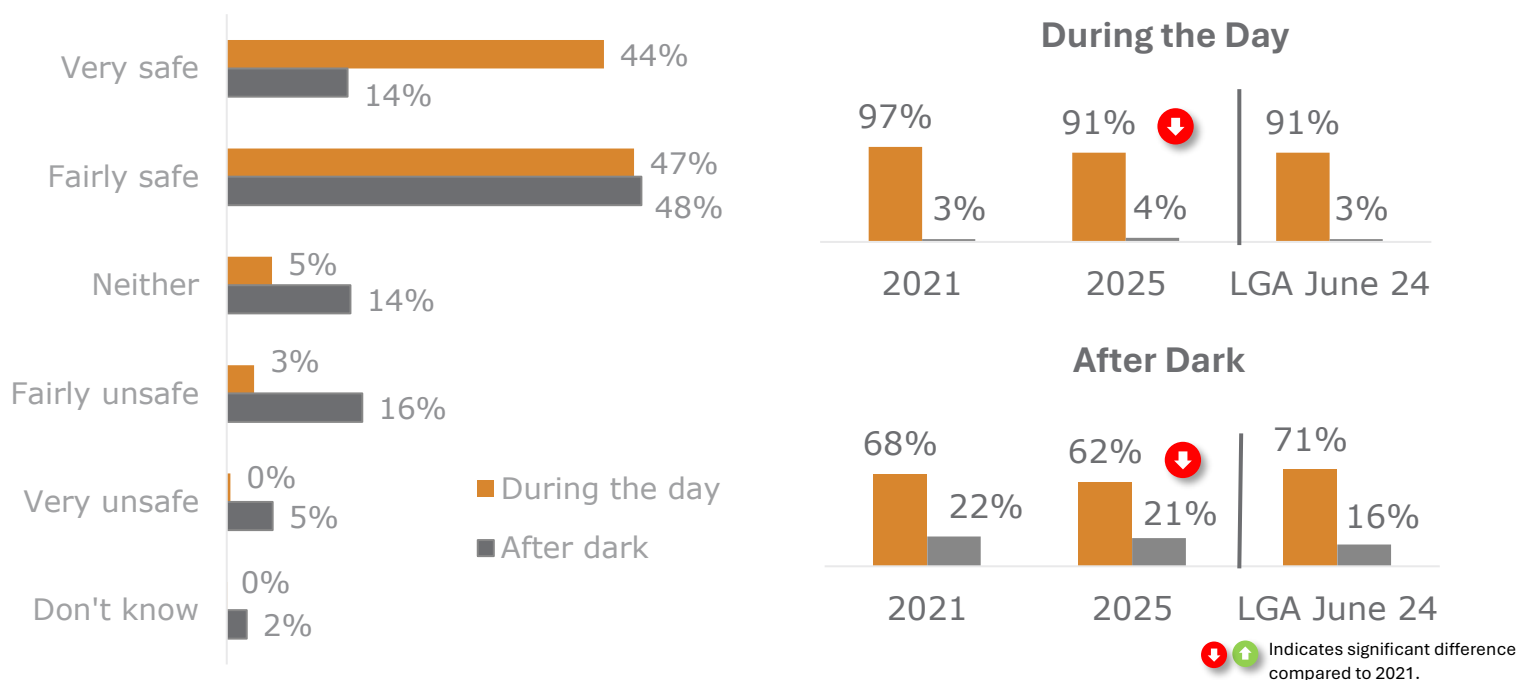


The results for sense of belonging to local area follow a similar pattern to local area satisfaction, with overall positive sentiment matching 2021 levels despite a softening in the granular results. Those aged 35-44 are more likely to feel a strong sense of belonging to the local area (82%). In contrast, those aged 45-54 are more likely to have answered not very/not at all strongly (31%). Those who feel unsafe after dark (55%) or during the day (36%) are less likely to feel a strong sense of belonging.

### Feelings of Safety in Local Area







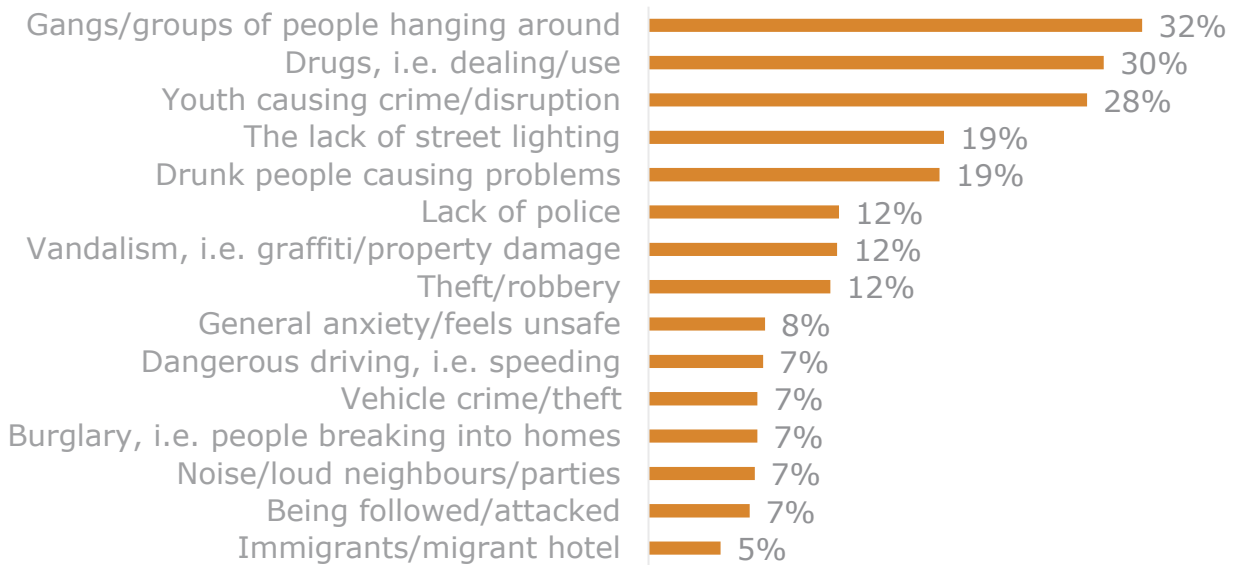
Nine in ten residents feel safe when outside in their local area during the day, dropping to six in ten for when it is dark. During the day figures are in line with the latest available LGA benchmarking, while the percentage who feel safe after dark is 9% points lower. It is, however, disappointing that feelings of safety during the day have declined by 6% points.

Females (31%) are three times more likely to feel unsafe after dark compared to males (10%), however during the day there is no statistically significant difference between the groups (males 3%; females 4% unsafe). Feelings of safety trend upwards from the most deprived to the least deprived areas.

While the findings from this question have not improved compared to the previous Residents Survey in 2021, it is important to view these results as part of the broader context. Firstly, it is important to note the context of the Covid-19 Pandemic and consequent lockdowns that may have impacted the findings during 2021 and what may have ultimately increased perceived feelings of safety amongst residents during this time, such as residents being asked to stay at home under Health Protection Regulations. Secondly, national polling on community safety in 2023 revealed a notable contrast between urban and rural areas, with residents in urban locations expressing greater concern about crime levels, particularly anti-social behaviour (ASB). This suggests that, like other urban towns, Stevenage residents may be more likely to report lower levels of perceived safety compared to those living in rural areas. As a result of both of these factors, it's important to recognise that the findings reflect the impact of specific time-based circumstances, such as the pandemic, and the limitations of national benchmarks, which may not fully account for the unique challenges faced by urban areas like Stevenage.



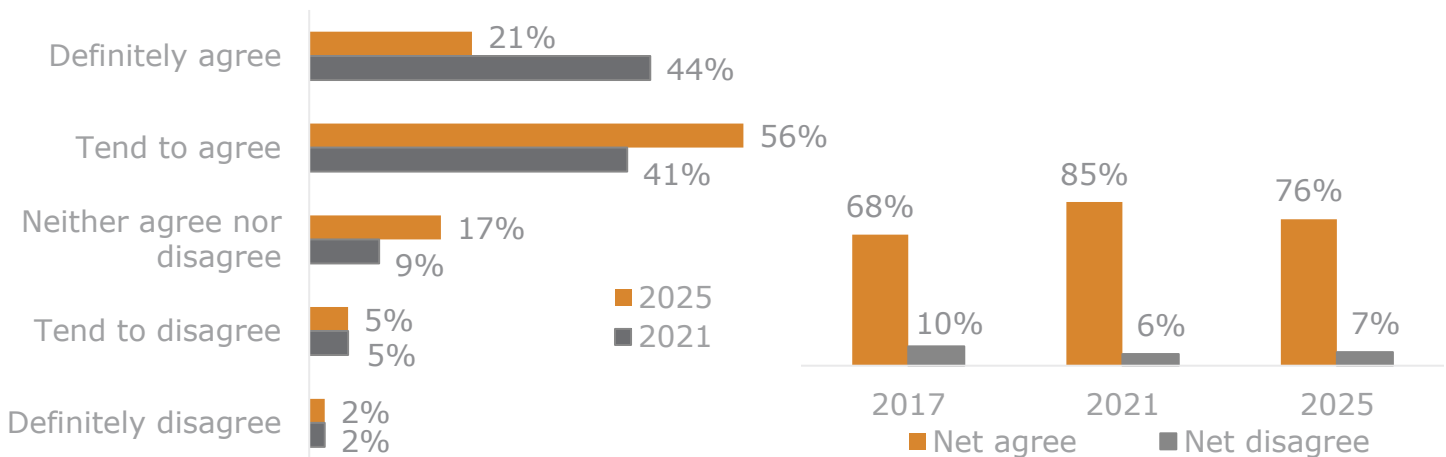
## Greatest concerns about being outside



Those who felt unsafe were asked a follow-up question to establish their greatest concerns about being outside. A clear top three emerges among the concerns raised – gangs/groups (32%), drugs (30%) and youth crime/disruption (28%).

Those aged 18-44 list more concerns, and are far more likely than other age groups to express worries about drugs, youth crime, drunk people, vandalism and burglary. Those who are non-white are twice as likely as those who are white to mention a lack of street lighting (34% cf. 17%). Those with a disability are three times more likely to fear being followed/attacked (12% cf. 4%).

## Community Cohesion in Local Area



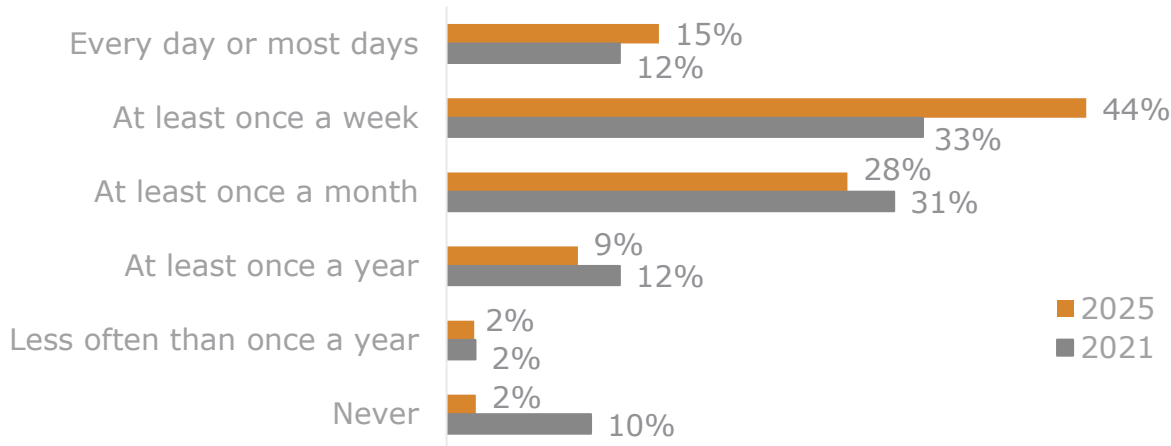
7% of all residents who were surveyed were unable to provide a valid answer to this question either because they felt there are too few people in their local area or due to ethnic homogeneity (as well as those who selected “don’t know”). Results for this question excluding these individuals are charted on this slide to allow for a like-for like comparison with 2021. On this basis, agreement has dropped since 2021 but is still comfortably above the 2017 result. Encouragingly, there has been no uptick in disagreement, while there has been a shift towards the neutral response.

Social renters are less likely to agree than owners (69% cf. 77%). 18-44-year-olds are slightly more likely than average to agree (79%) but the reverse is true for those aged 45-64 (72%). Those who



are dissatisfied with their local area are nearly nine times as likely to disagree compared to those who are satisfied (34% cf. 4%)

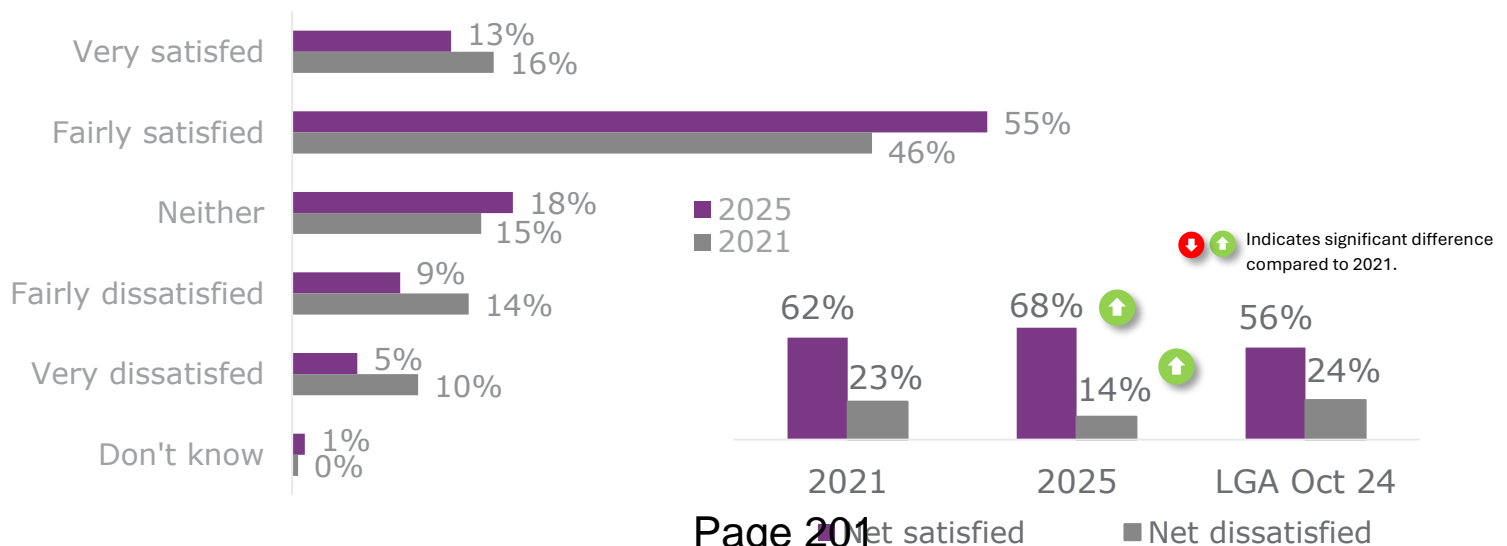
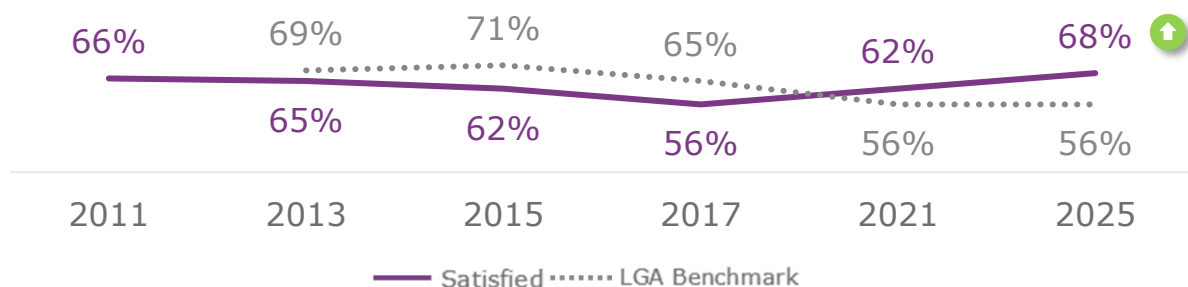
### Stevenage Town Centre Frequency of Visits



There has been an uptick in the percentage of residents who visit the city centre regularly, particularly for the frequency “at least once a week”. Interestingly, the percentage who never visit the city centre has declined by 8% points this wave. Near a quarter of 18–44-year-olds visit the town centre every or most days (23%). This percentage is five times higher than 45-64-year-olds and twice as high as those aged 65+.

## The Council

### Overall Satisfaction with Stevenage Borough Council



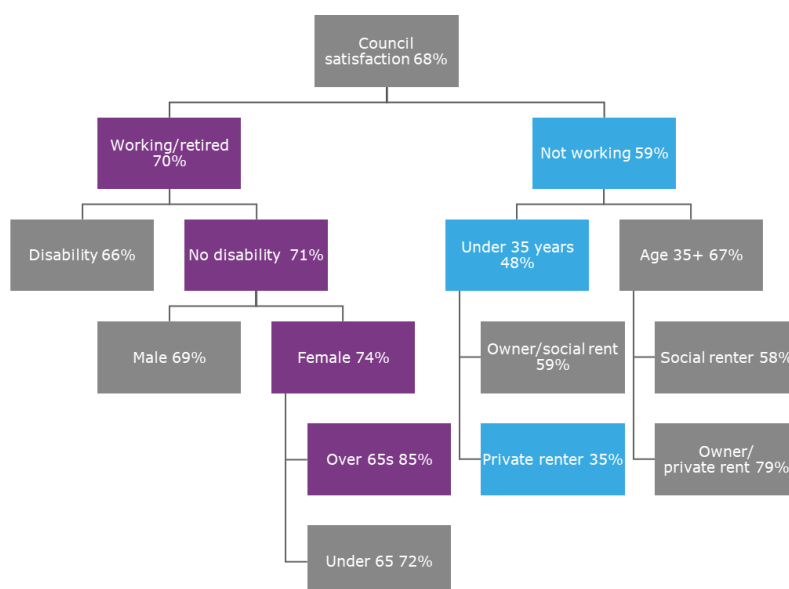


Satisfaction with Stevenage council has increased significantly by 6% points compared to 2021, driven by an increase in the percentage who are fairly satisfied. Moreover, satisfaction is 12% points higher than the LGA benchmark.

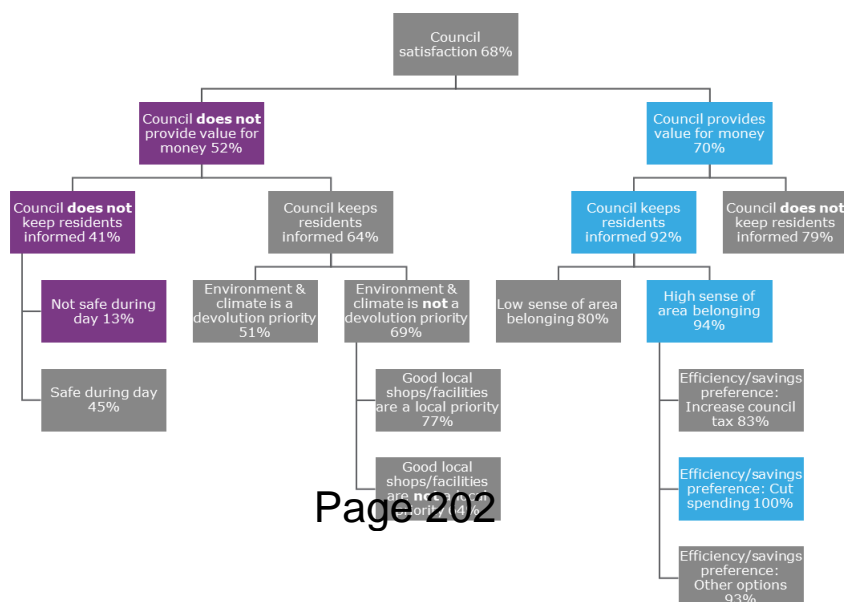
Those aged 18-34 are significantly less likely than average to be satisfied (63%), owing to a higher percentage who are neutral (24%). The economically inactive (18%), particularly those who are not retired (20%) are more likely to be dissatisfied than average.

### Overall satisfaction with Stevenage Borough Council: CHAID analysis (demographics)

Chi-square automatic interaction detection (CHAID) analysis builds a predictive model, or tree, to help determine how variables best merge to explain the outcome in the given dependent variable. The analysis starts with 'all respondents', then identifies which factor when split by this factor sees the largest difference in the dependent variable. The tree filters only as far as it can until either a) the sample size becomes too small, or b) there are no longer any statistically significant differences by factors.



As can be seen in the tree above, the factor that has the biggest influence on ratings of council satisfaction is working status – with those who are working/retired having higher satisfaction than those who are not working. Taking this further, those who are working/retired, have no disability, are female and over 65 represent the ‘optimal pathway’ (i.e. the combination of demographics with the highest satisfaction). 85% of this cohort are satisfied. In contrast, those who are not working, are under 35 and privately rent have the lowest level of satisfaction (35% satisfied).



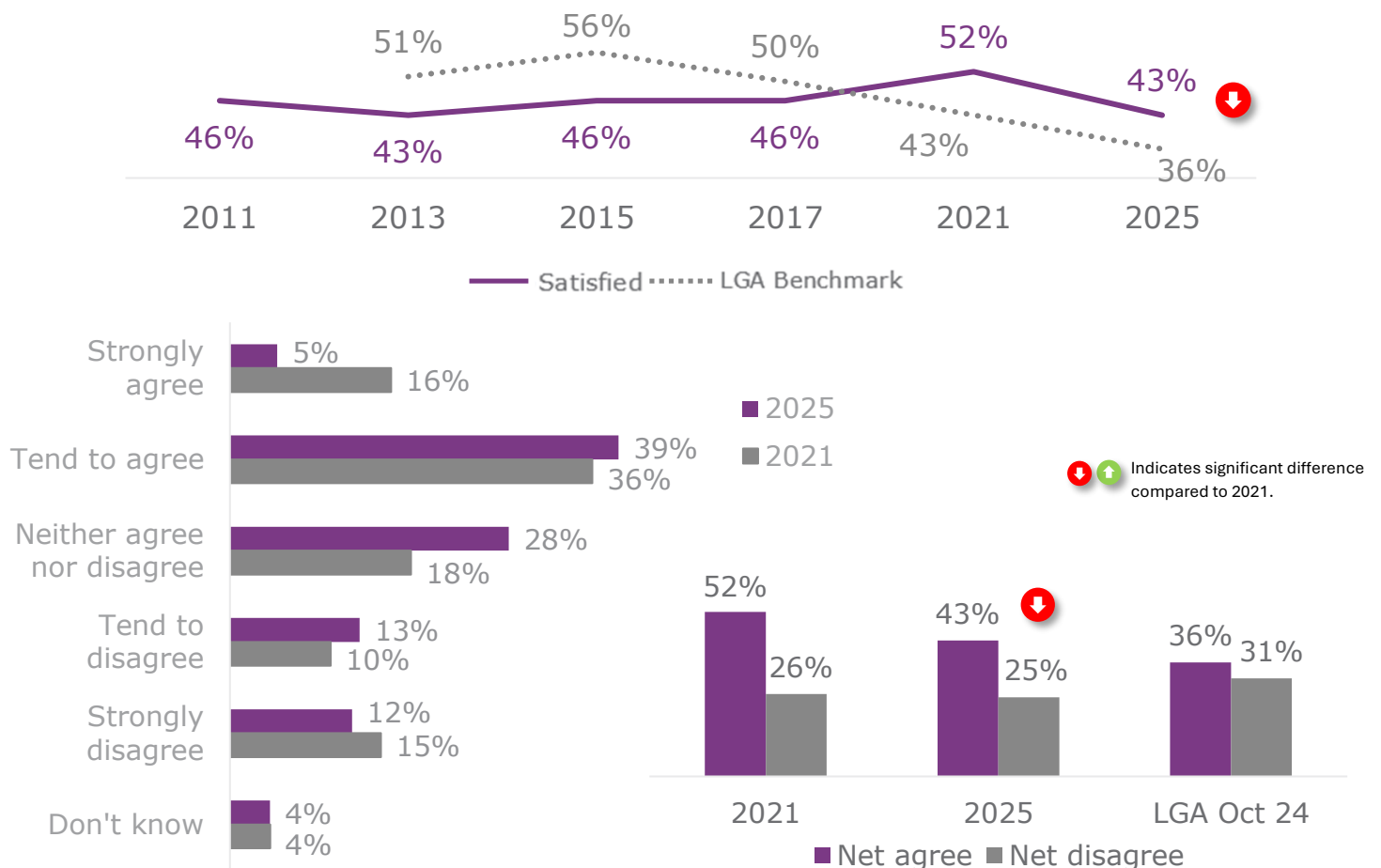


When looking at council satisfaction through an attitudinal lens, opinions on whether the council provides value for money are the key divider – 70% of those positive about this are satisfied with the council compared to 52% who are negative.

The ‘optimal path’ (i.e. those with the highest satisfaction) is those who believe the council provides value for money, feel the council keeps residents informed, have a high sense of area belonging and would prefer to cut spending (100% satisfied). In contrast, those who do not feel the council provides value for money, feel the council does not keep them informed and do not feel safe during the day are the least likely cohort to be satisfied (13%).

## Perceptions of Value for Money

*Agreement that the council provides value for money:*

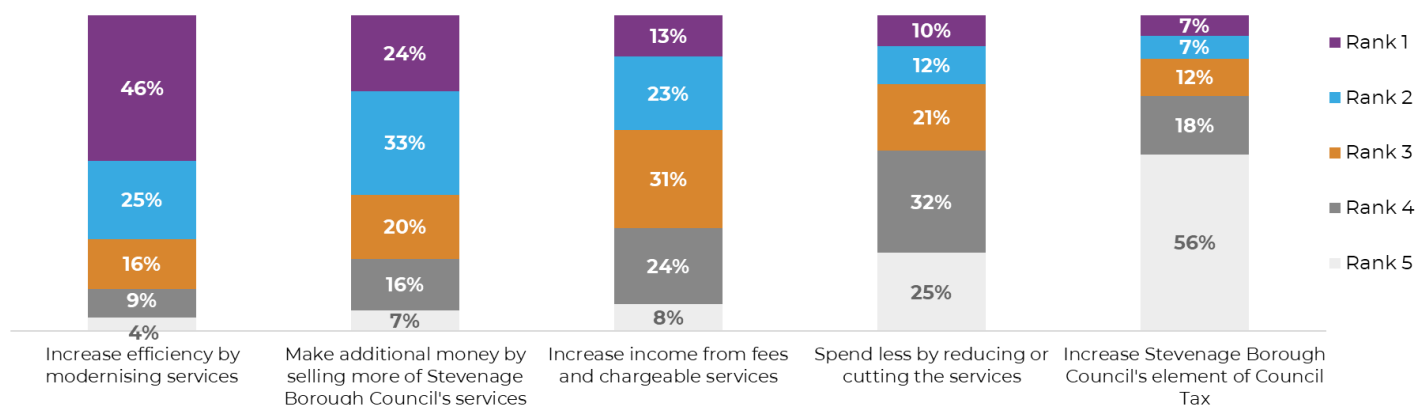


Only two in five agree that the council tax paid to Stevenage Borough council provides value for money (43%). This percentage is 9% points lower than the 2021 figure, although it should be noted that the percentage who disagree has not increased and instead this decline is driven by an increase in the neutral rating. Moreover, it should be highlighted that Stevenage’s performance remains comfortably better than the LGA benchmark (+7% points).

Females are 7% points less likely to agree than males that Stevenage Borough Council provides value for money (40% cf. 47%). Again, this is driven by higher neutral ratings among females. Those in the most deprived IMD quintile are more likely to feel they are getting value for money (59%).



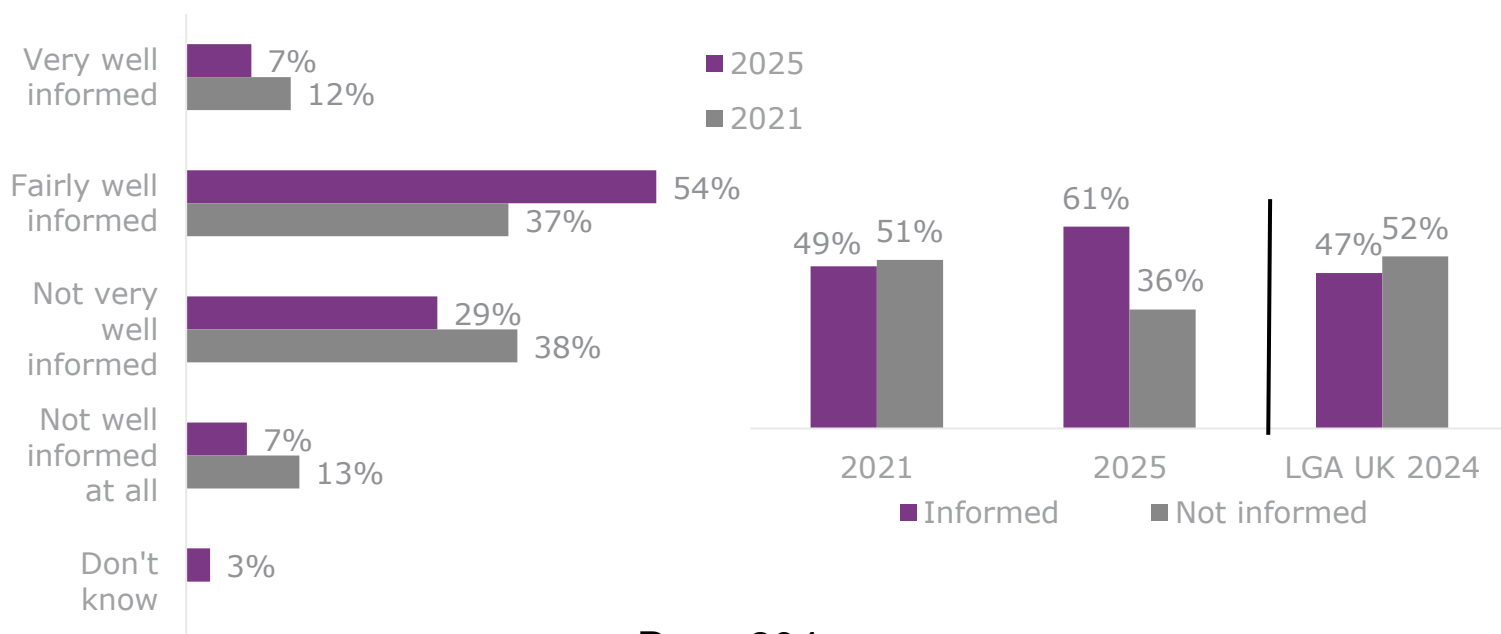
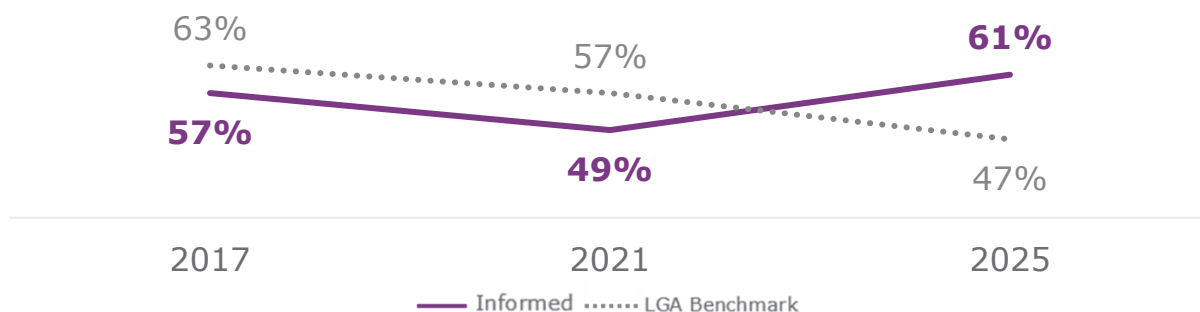
## Preferred efficiencies and savings



Increasing efficiency by modernising services is by far the most popular of the options given for generating savings/efficiencies. Nearly half of those able to express preferences ranked this as number one (46%), and a quarter (25%) ranked it as their number two preference. Selling more of the council's services is the second most popular, followed by increasing income from fees and chargeable services. The prospect of raising Stevenage's element of council tax is unpopular, with more than half (56%) ranking this 5th.

## Perceptions of Stevenage Borough Council Services

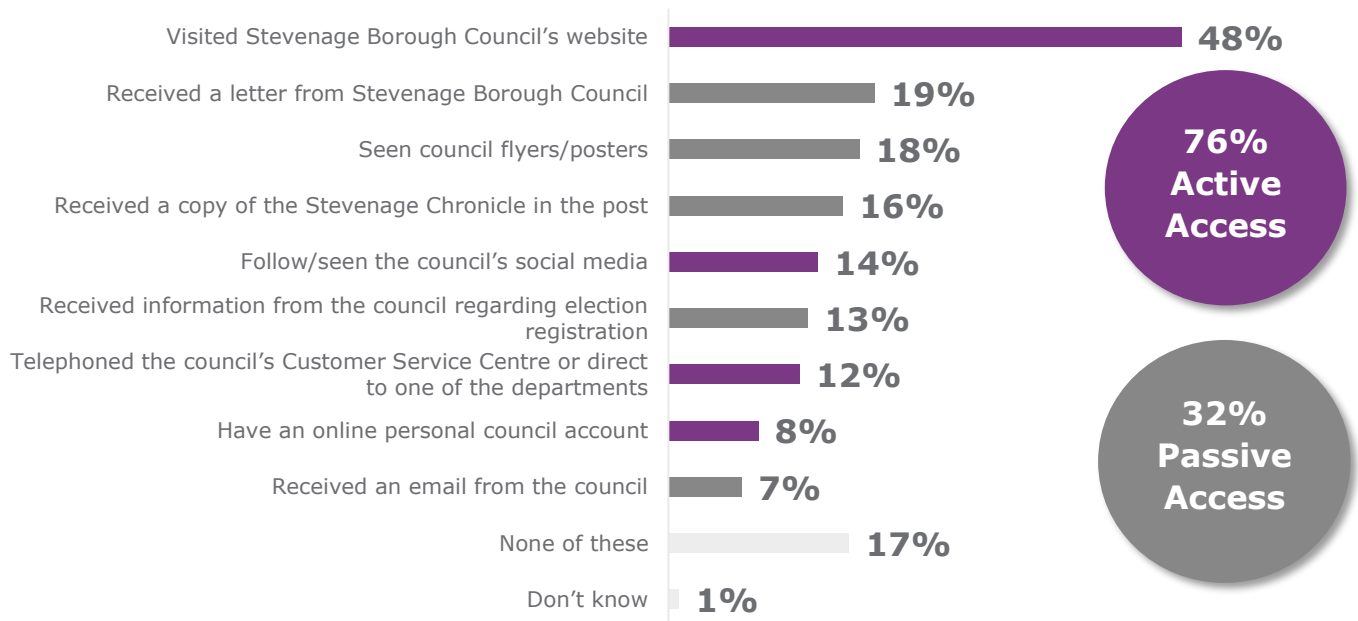
Feel informed about council services:





Younger residents (18-44, 69%) are more likely to feel informed compared to middle aged (45-64, 55%) and older (65+, 55%) residents. Those who agree that the council provides value for money are more than twice as likely to feel informed about council services than those who disagree (81% cf. 35%).

### Ways to access information about council services



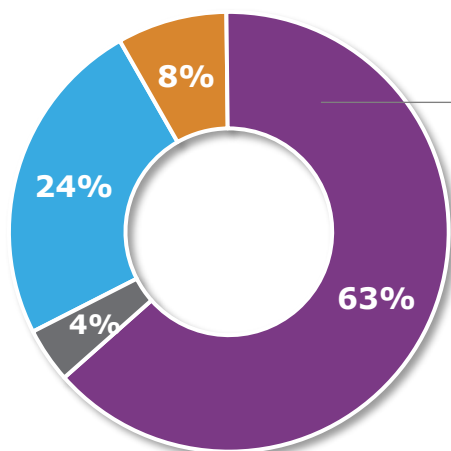
The top way, by far, to access information about council services is to visit the council's website (48%). The next most common is a letter (19%), followed by council flyers/posters (18%) or the Stevenage Chronicle (16%). Just behind these, 14% report following or seeing the council's posts on social media. 76% of residents report proactively accessing information (e.g. by visiting the website) while 32% report passively accessing information (e.g. by receiving a letter in the post).

Visiting the council website is the most common way of accessing information across all age groups. However, those who are aged 65+ are significantly more likely to say that they have not accessed any information (26%). Residents aged 45-64 are significantly more likely to access information via the Council's website, than residents aged 18-44 (59% and 42% respectively). Residents aged 18-44 are significantly more likely to access information through all other ways charted (apart from through an online account), than residents aged 45+.



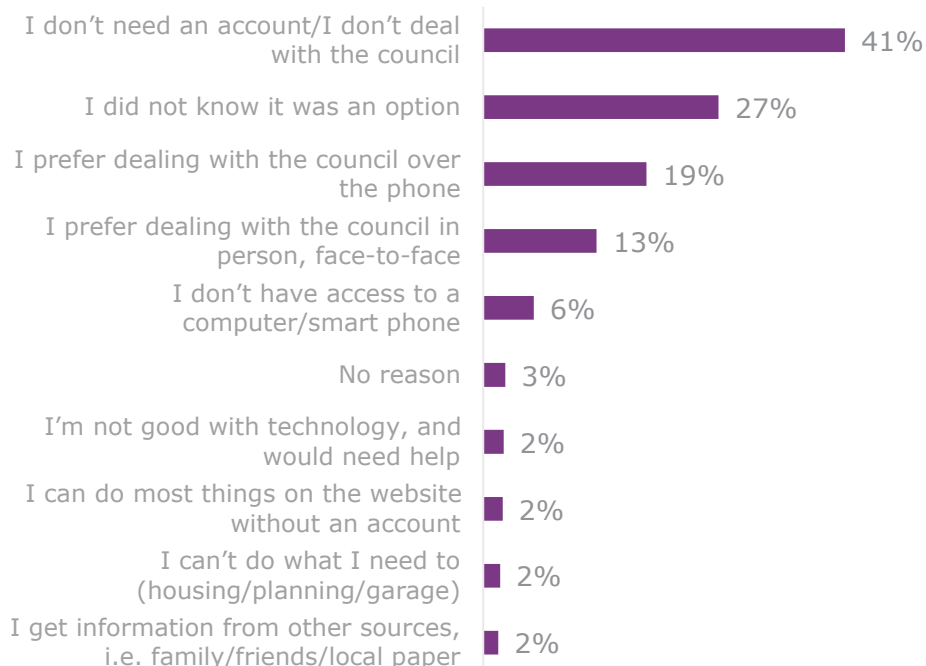
## Online Personal Council Account Holders

### Have Online Personal Council Account



- Yes - use it
- Yes - but don't use it
- No
- Don't know

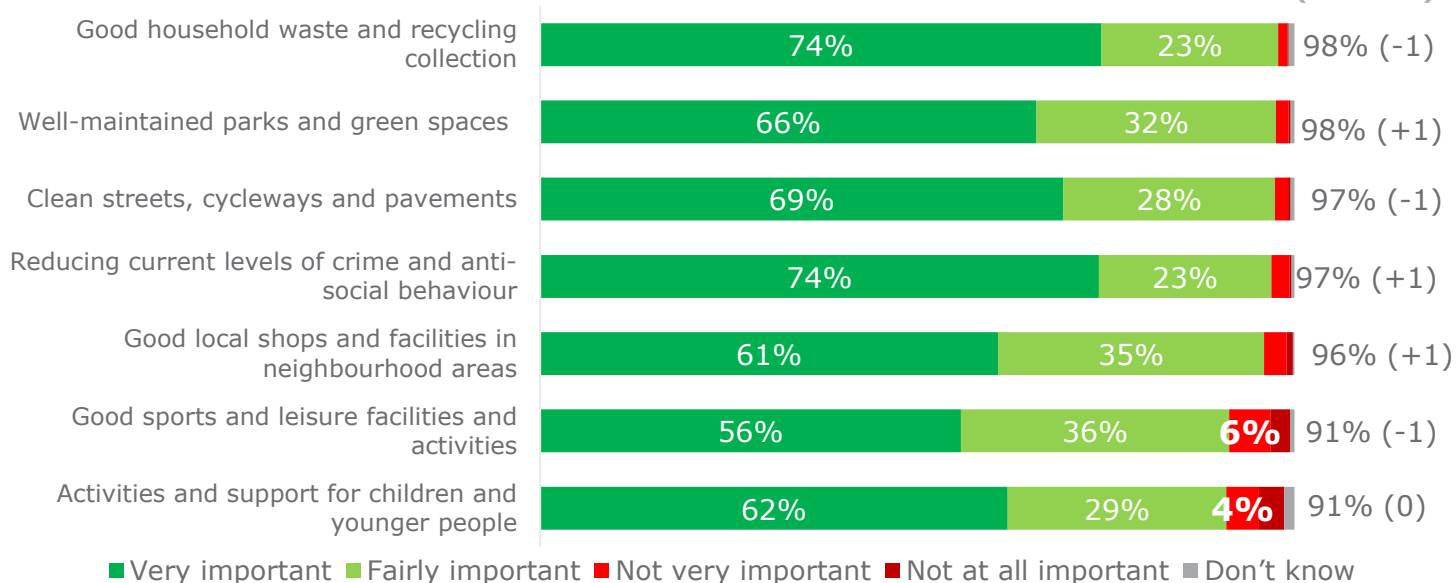
### Reasons For Not Having Account



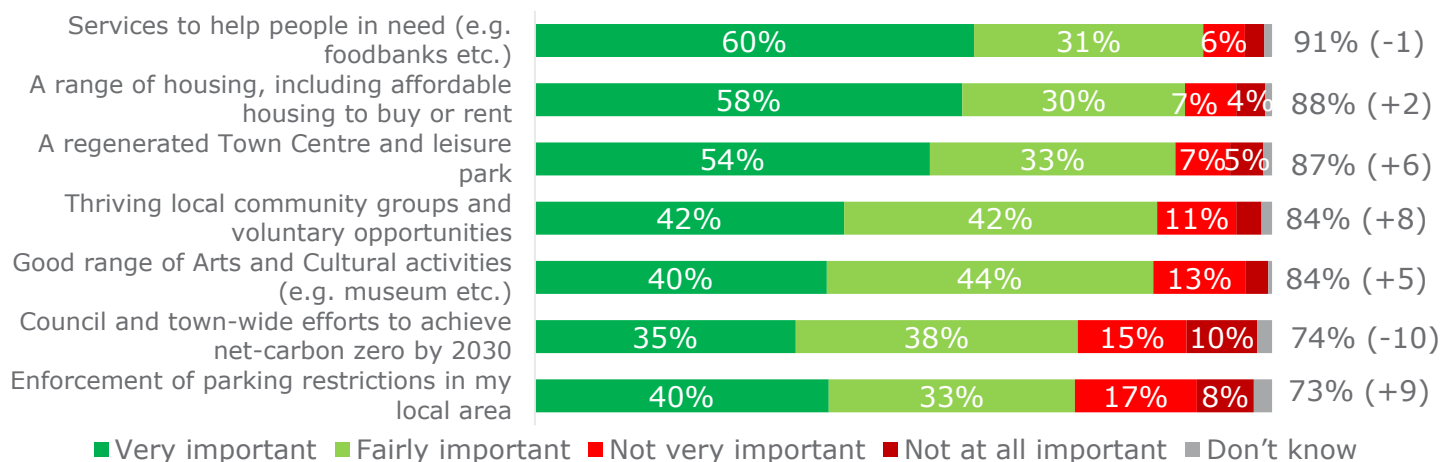
One in three residents report having an online personal account (32%), although only a quarter say that they use it (24%). Of the near two-thirds who don't have an account, the top reason given for this is a feeling that they do not need one (41%). Interestingly, a quarter of these residents say that they didn't know it was an option, indicating that the council may be able to improve take-up through targeted, effective comms. Around one-third of those aged 45-64 or 65+ who do not have an account say that they were not aware of this as an option.

## General views on importance of service provision

Very/fairly important  
(vs. 2021)

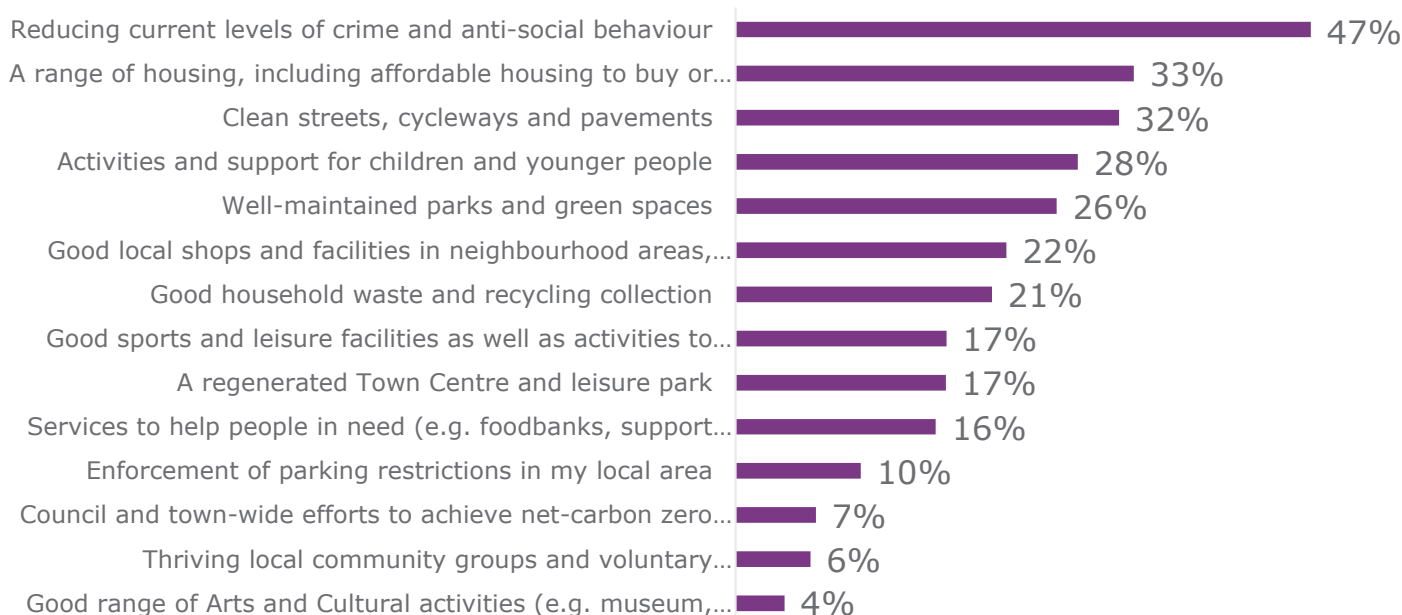






In terms of service provision, views are largely consistent with last year, although there are a few notable deviations for services that are considered less important. Specifically, there have been significant upticks in the importance ratings for the enforcement of parking restrictions, arts & cultural activities, local community/voluntary groups, and town centre/leisure park regeneration. In contrast, the percentage who think efforts to reach net-zero is important has declined by 10% points, although it should be noted that three-quarters of residents do still deem this to be very or fairly important.

### Top 3 Priorities for Residents

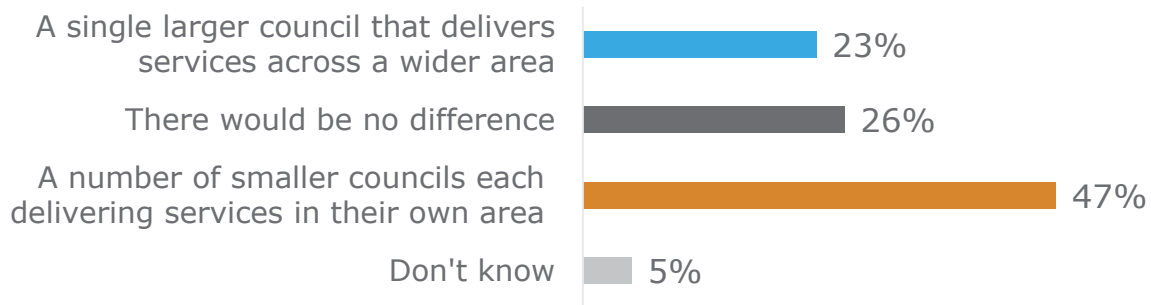


Following on from this, residents were asked to select their top three priority services from the same list. Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour emerges as a clear priority, (47%), and this is unsurprising given it was the top theme mentioned when residents were asked about specific issues affecting their local area. The next most selected priorities are housing (33%) and clean streets (32%). The council should look to prioritise these areas in order to help improve satisfaction going forward.



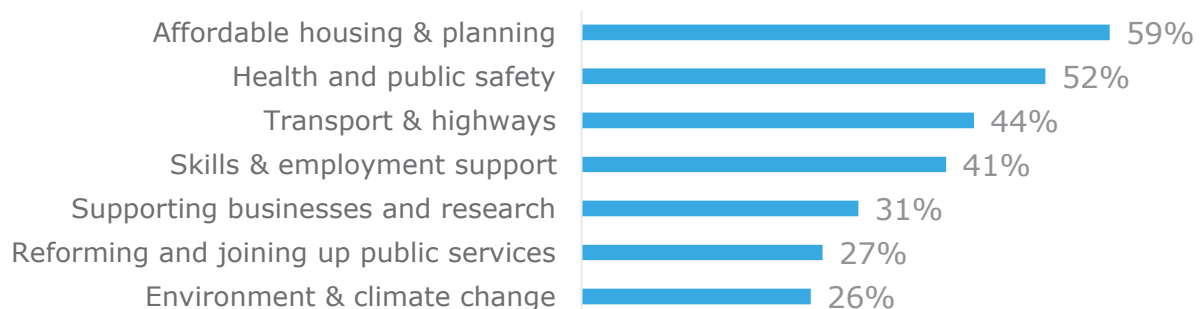
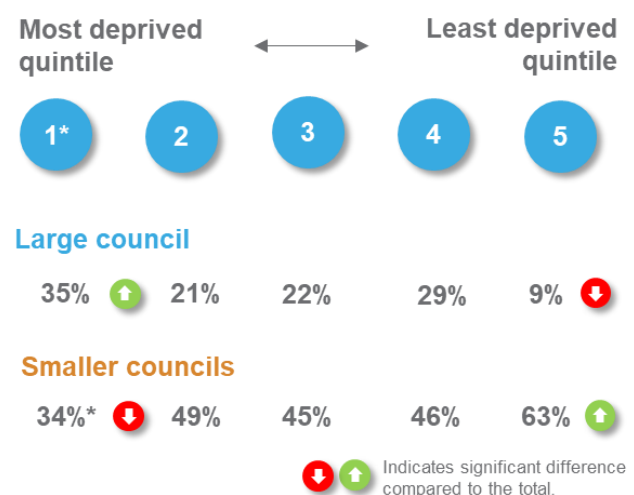
# Local Government Reorganisation & Devolution

## Ideal LGR Council Size



Nearly half of residents feel that a number of smaller councils would be the more effective in terms of maintaining the quality of service delivery; just a quarter favoured a single larger council (23%), and a similar proportion felt that council size would make no difference (26%).

Homeowners are more likely than renters to favour smaller councils (55% cf. 36%), while renters are more inclined to feel that it would not make a difference (33% cf. 21%). Views are fairly consistent across the middle quintiles within the Indices of Multiple Deprivation but vary between the lowest and highest quintiles, as shown on the right:



Residents would most like to prioritise affordable housing & planning (59%), followed by health & public safety (52%) and transport & highways (44%). Skills and employment support narrowly misses out on the top three (41%).

Affordable housing and planning is, again, more of a priority for those aged 18-44 (67%). Meanwhile, the two older age groups (45-64, 65+) are more likely to be concerned with health & public safety (59%; 64%) and transport & highways (49%; 63%). Females are more likely than males to prioritise affordable housing and planning (62% cf. 56%) and skills & employment support (44% cf. 38%), while males are more likely to prioritise supporting businesses and research (35% cf. 27%) and reforming public services (31% cf. 24%).

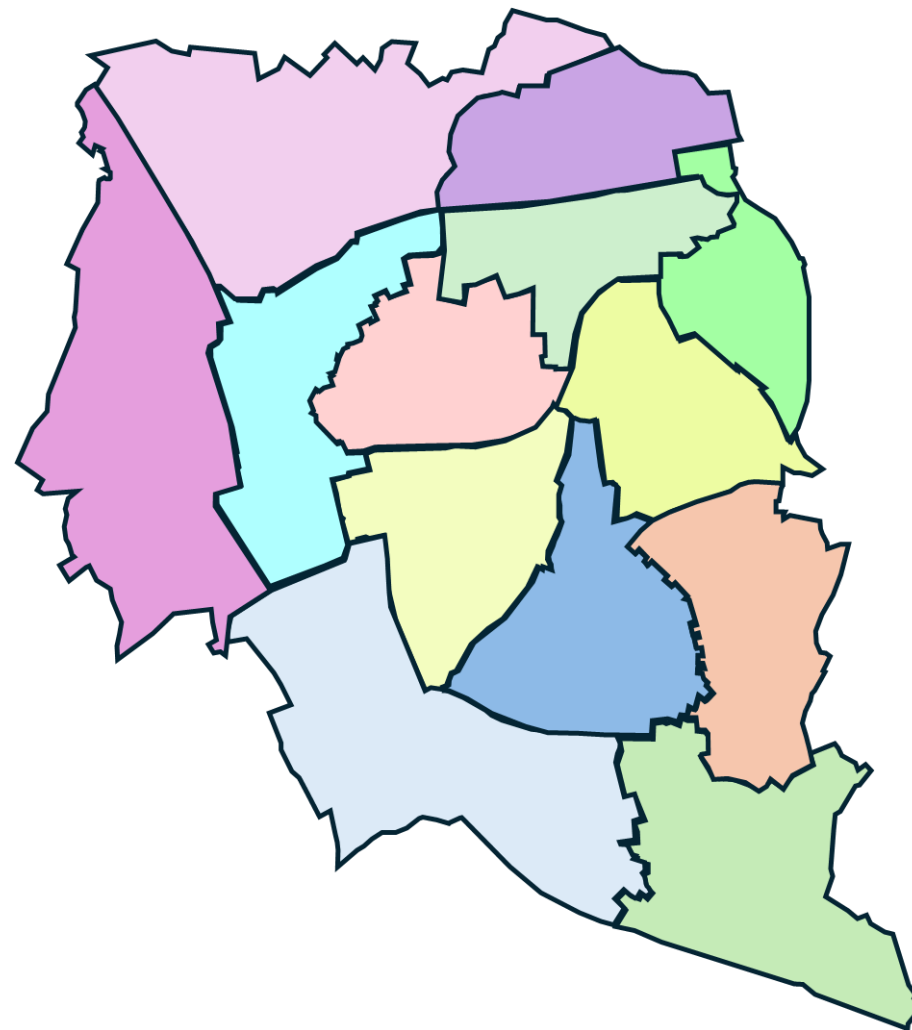


## Ward Cluster Analysis

As part of the 2025 Residents Survey, Stevenage wards have been combined into three distinct clusters for the purposes of reporting, these are as follows:

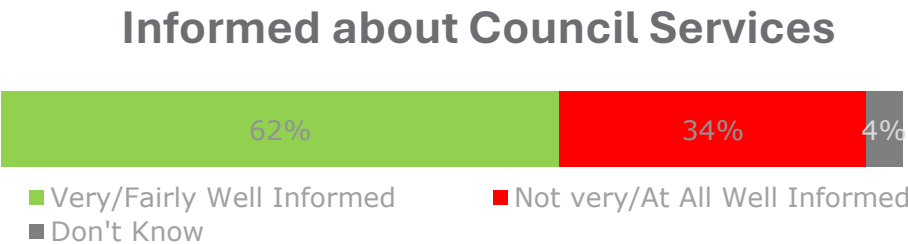
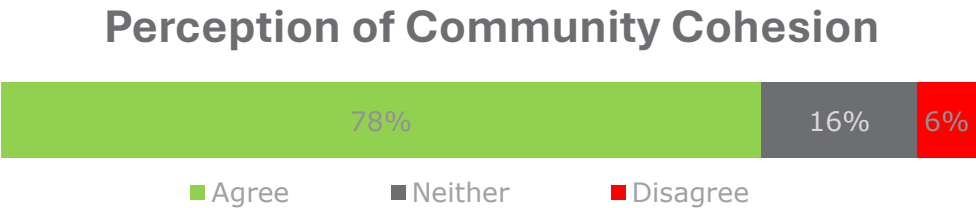
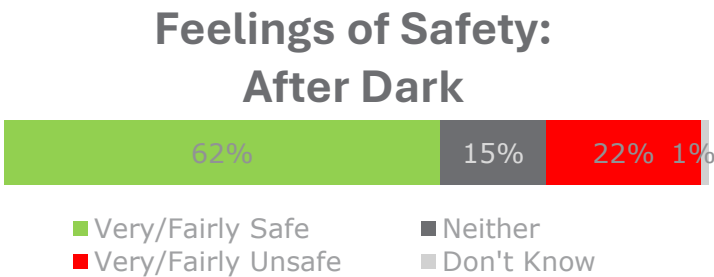
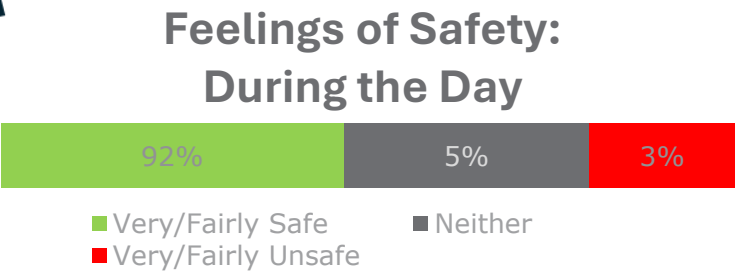
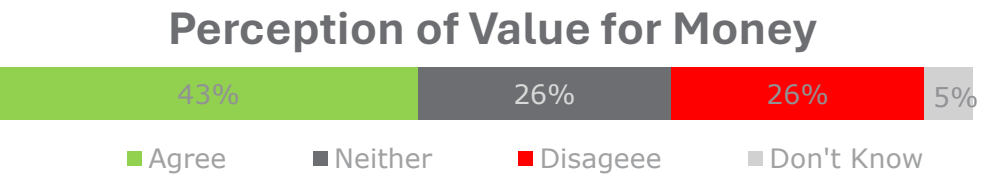
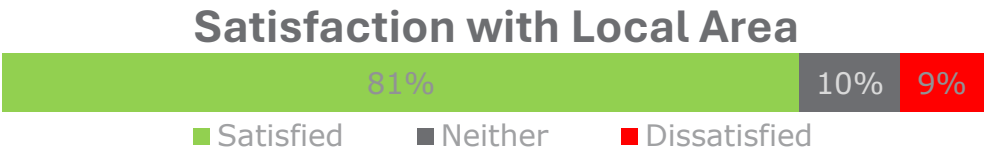
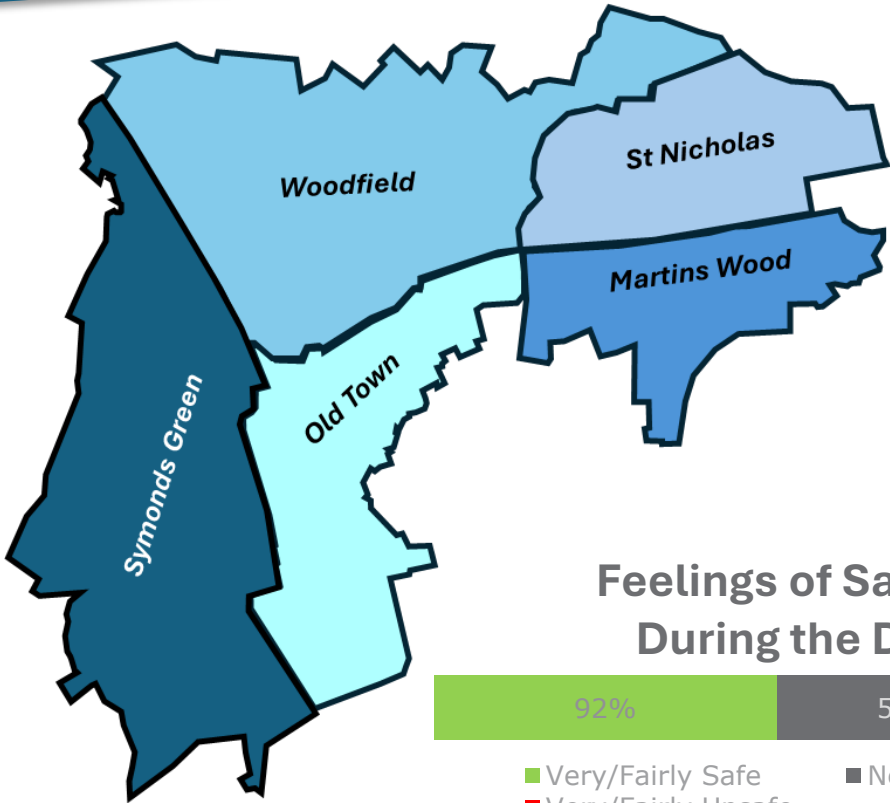
- North: St Nicholas, Martins Wood, Woodfield, Old Town, Symonds Green
- Central: Chells, Manor, Bedwell, Almond Hill
- South: Shephall, Bandley Hill & Poplars, Longmeadow, Roebuck

A dedicated ward cluster profile has been created for each of these on the next few pages. These profiles offer more detailed insights into how Stevenage residents responded when they specifically considered their local ward area, and how these views differ across the town as a whole. However, whilst these specific statistics provide invaluable insights, it should be noted that due to the finite statistical reliability outlined in the background and methodology section of this report, the further the statistic is drilled down and analysed, the less robust it is.





# North Ward Cluster





## North Ward Cluster Breakdown

Ward	Satisfaction with Local Area	Feelings of Safety		Perceptions of Community Cohesion	Satisfaction with the Council	Perceptions of Value for Money	Informed about Council Services
		During the Day	After Dark				
Martins Wood	79%	96%	59%	77%	70%	33%	52%
Old Town	82%	90%	71%	68%	79%	55%	74%
St Nicholas	88%	91%	56%	87%	68%	48%	64%
Symonds Green	79%	89%	66%	75%	58%	37%	58%
Woodfield	78%	90%	58%	80%	68%	46%	66%

### Top Five Perceived Issues in North Ward Cluster

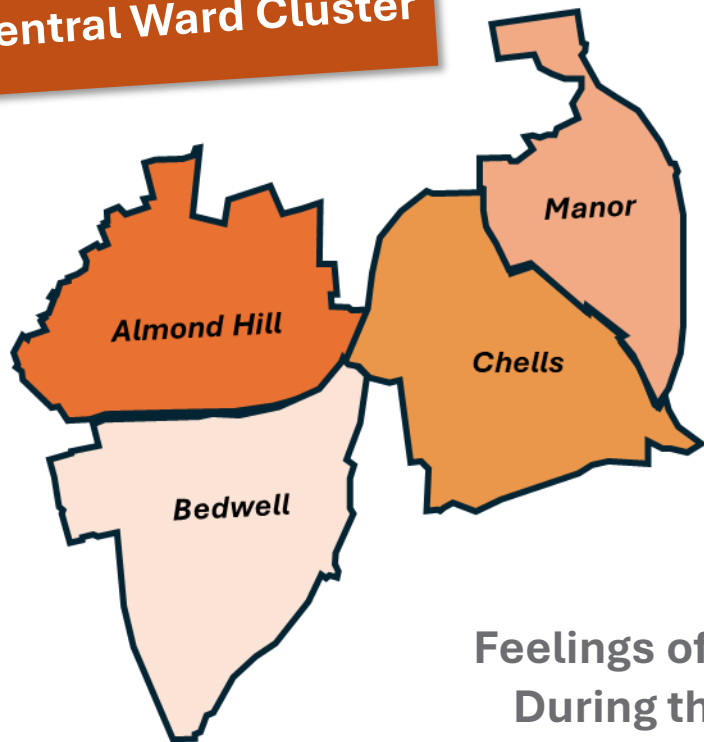
Crime, anti-social behaviour and police visibility	19%
Lack of maintenance/ neglect of environment/area is in decline	17%
Severe parking issues/concerns	10%
Road quality/condition and pothole concerns	7%
Frustration with council engagement and responsiveness	6%

### Greatest Concerns Outside in North Ward Cluster

Gangs/groups of people hanging around	29%
Drugs, i.e. dealing/use	26%
Youth causing crime/disruption	28%
The lack of street lighting	17%
Drunk people causing problems	20%



# Central Ward Cluster



## Satisfaction with Local Area



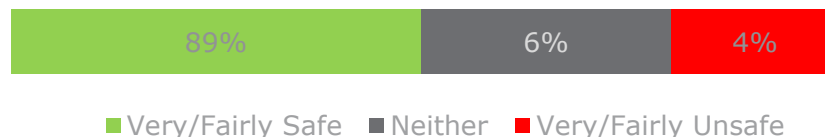
## Satisfaction with the Council



## Perception of Value for Money



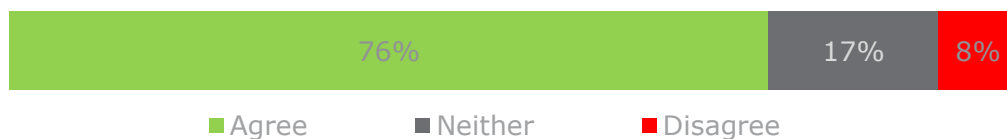
## Feelings of Safety: During the Day



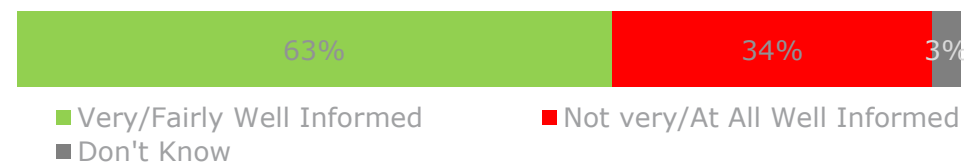
## Feelings of Safety: After Dark



## Perception of Community Cohesion



## Informed about Council Services





## Central Ward Cluster Breakdown

Ward	Satisfaction with Local Area	Feelings of Safety		Perceptions of Community Cohesion	Satisfaction with the Council	Perceptions of Value for Money	Informed about Council Services
		During the Day	After Dark				
Almond Hill	83%	88%	58%	75%	69%	48%	62%
Bedwell	78%	83%	50%	76%	72%	52%	65%
Chells	83%	94%	59%	75%	60%	34%	60%
Manor	82%	93%	74%	77%	76%	39%	67%

### Top Five Perceived Issues in Central Ward Cluster

Crime, anti-social behaviour and police visibility	21%
Lack of maintenance/ neglect of environment/area is in decline	15%
Severe parking issues/concerns	18%
Frustration with council engagement and responsiveness	6%
Road quality/condition and pothole concerns	6%

### Greatest Concerns Outside in Central Ward Cluster

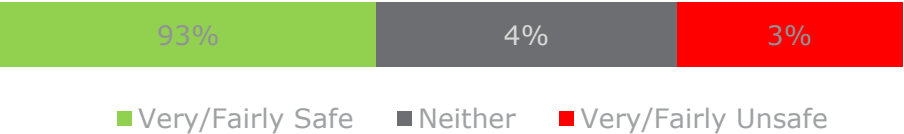
Gangs/groups of people hanging around	39%
Drugs, i.e. dealing/use	40%
Youth causing crime/disruption	29%
The lack of street lighting	21%
Drunk people causing problems	13%



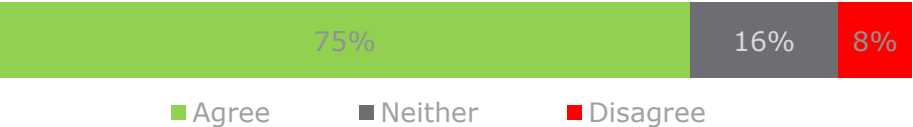
South Ward Cluster



Feelings of Safety: During the Day



Perception of Community Cohesion



Satisfaction with Local Area



Satisfaction with the Council



Perception of Value for Money



Feelings of Safety: After Dark



Informed about Council Provided Services





Central Ward Cluster Breakdown							
Ward	Satisfaction with Local Area	Feelings of Safety		Perceptions of Community Cohesion	Satisfaction with the Council	Perceptions of Value for Money	Informed about Council Services
		During the Day	After Dark				
Bandle Hill & Poplars	87%	94%	61%	80%	75%	45%	66%
Longmeadow	93%	97%	70%	71%	62%	44%	53%
Shephall	85%	94%	66%	76%	65%	43%	60%
Roebuck	81%	87%	64%	75%	60%	41%	51%

Top Five Perceived Issues in South Ward Cluster	
Crime, anti-social behaviour and police visibility	17%
Lack of maintenance/ neglect of environment/area is in decline	16%
Severe parking issues/concerns	14%
Decline of local retail/commercial activity	8%
Road quality/condition and pothole concerns	6%

Greatest Concerns Outside in South Ward Cluster	
Gangs/groups of people hanging around	26%
Drugs, i.e. dealing/use	20%
Youth causing crime/disruption	27%
The lack of street lighting	19%
Drunk people causing problems	24%



# Appendix A

## 2025 Residents Survey Infographic

### STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL RESIDENTS SURVEY 2025

The latest survey shows that most residents are satisfied with their local area and the council's performance. Encouragingly, Stevenage outperforms national benchmarks for the majority of resident satisfaction measures, demonstrating that Stevenage is a great place to live. The findings from this survey will help guide the council's planning for the future.



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#### SATISFIED WITH THE LOCAL AREA

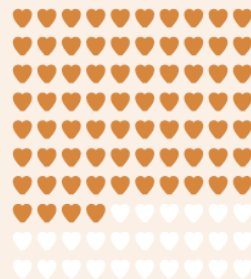


**83%**

are satisfied with their local area

This compares favourably to the national average of: **74%**

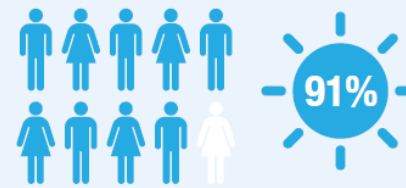
#### FEEL A SENSE OF BELONGING



**74%**

of residents feel a strong sense of belonging to local area

#### FEELINGS OF SAFETY DURING THE DAY



of residents feel very or fairly safe during the day

#### FEELINGS OF VALUE FOR MONEY



**43%**

of residents agree that the council provides value for money

This compares favourably to the national average of: **36%**

#### SATISFIED WITH STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL



**68%**

are satisfied with the council (up from 62% in 2021)

This compares favourably to the national average of: **56%**

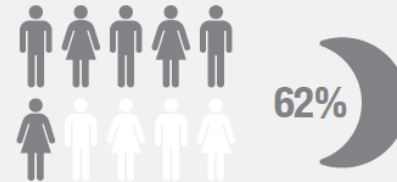
#### FEEL INFORMED ABOUT OUR SERVICES

**61%**

This compares favourably to the national average of: **47%**



#### FEELINGS OF SAFETY AFTER DARK



of residents feel safe after dark in Stevenage

#### TOP 3 PRIORITIES FOR RESIDENTS ARE:



**47%**

to reduce crime & anti-social behaviour



**33%**

to have a range of affordable housing



**32%**

to have clean streets, cycleways & pavements

Based on a survey of 1,103 residents conducted May-June 2025 using telephone and face-to-face interviewing. The national average refers to the latest (October 2024) results of the LGA's residents' satisfaction survey. Research and design by djsresearch.co.uk.

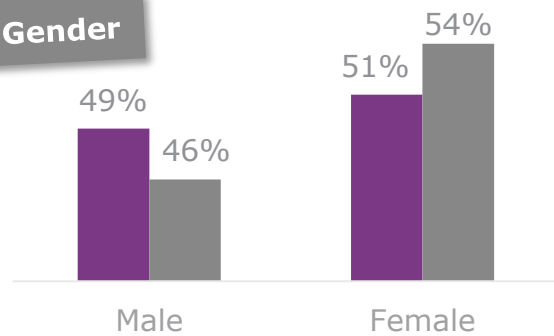


# Appendix B

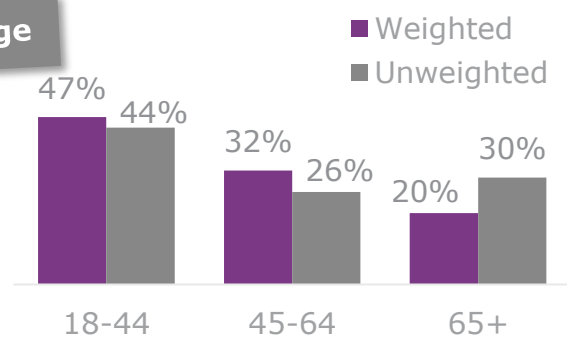
## Respondent Profile

Please note figures may not sum to 100% due to refusals (not charted) or rounding. Results have been weighted to the latest available population statistics.

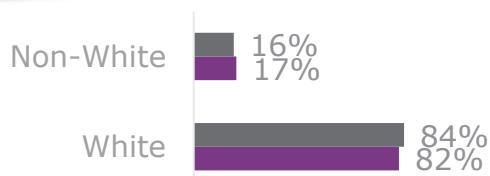
### Gender



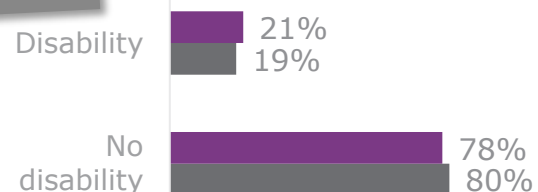
### Age



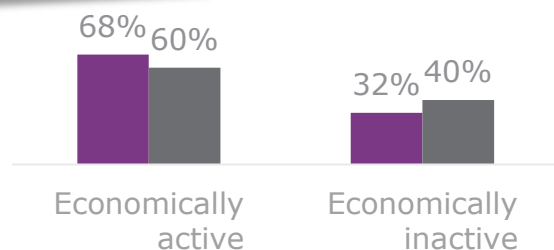
### Ethnicity



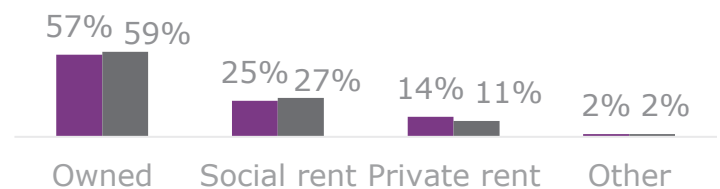
### Disability



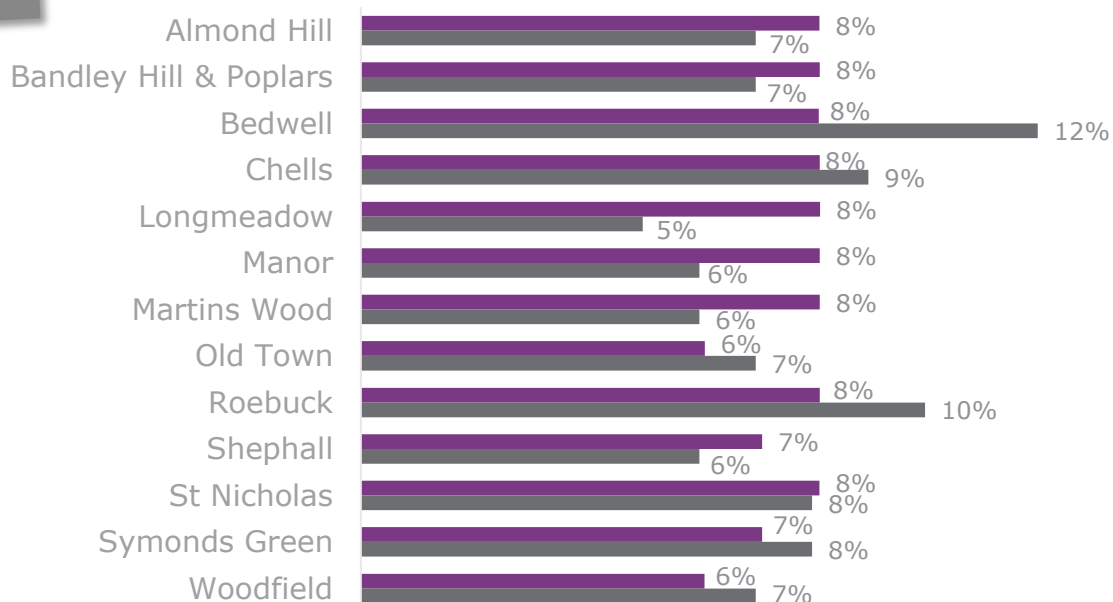
### Economic status



### Tenure



### Wards





# Appendix C

## 2025 Resident Survey Question set

No.	Question
1	Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your local area as a place to live?
2	Are there any specific issues or aspects of your local area you would like to inform us about?
3	How safe or unsafe do you feel when outside in your local area after dark?
4	How safe or unsafe do you feel when outside in your local area during the day?
5	What concerns you the most about being outside in your local area?
6	How strongly do you feel you belong to your local area?
7	To what extent do you agree or disagree that your local area is a place where people from different ethnic backgrounds get on well together?
8	To help the council understand residents' priorities in terms of the services it provides, can you please tell us which of the following areas you consider to be of importance to you?
9	Now using the same list, I would like you to tell me, of the service areas you consider to be important , can you please tell me your top three priority areas?
10	How often do you visit Stevenage Town Centre?
11	Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way Stevenage Borough Council runs things?
12	Overall, how well informed do you think Stevenage Borough Council keeps residents about the services it provides?
13	During the past 12 months, how have you accessed information about the council and its services?
14	Do you have an online personal council account? If not, could you please tell us why?
15	To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council Tax paid to Stevenage Borough Council provides value for money ?
16	The council continues to consider efficiencies and make savings where possible, please tell us your preference of where they should do this for each of the following options by ordering them 1 to 5, when 1 is most preferred and 5 is least preferred?
17	Stevenage Borough Council currently provides local services such as waste collection, leisure, planning, and housing. In your view, which of the following approaches would be more effective for maintaining the quality of these services?
18	The government is proposing to delegate further powers to local government. This is often referred to as devolution. What would be your top three priorities to improve your area through Devolution?



Part I – Release to Press



Agenda item: **##**

**Meeting** Cabinet  
**Portfolio Area** Leader of the Council  
**Date** 14 January 2026



## LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION AND LOCAL ELECTIONS 2026

### REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

**AUTHOR: CHIEF EXECUTIVE / SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM**

### NON-KEY DECISION

#### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 Following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024, the Government has indicated its intent to proceed with the restructuring of two-tier local government across England by April 2028. In addition to the submission of proposals from six county areas in the 'Devolution Priority Programme' in September 2025, 134 Councils from 14 county areas were invited to submit proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in their areas, by a deadline of 28 November 2025. An estimated 53 different proposals were submitted by 28 November 2025, including proposals submitted by Hertfordshire Councils including Stevenage Borough Council.
- 1.2 On the 18 December 2025, the Minister for Local Government and Homelessness wrote to the 64 local Councils in the 14 county areas where local elections are scheduled in May 2026 ("the Letter"). The Letter invites councils to set out their views on the potential postponement of their local election in May 2026, whether doing this would allow them to be better equipped to deliver local government reorganisation.



- 1.3 This report confirms that it is an 'Executive' function to respond to the Letter and invites Cabinet to consider its response to the invitation.
- 1.4 The Leader has consented to the report being dealt with as a matter of urgency as the letter received from the Government had a response deadline of 15 January and this is the first opportunity for Cabinet to consider the matter. Further advice and FAQ's had also been published on 6 January to inform preparation of this report, along with legal advice on the decision making process.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Cabinet is requested to:

- 2.1 Note the letter from the Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness on 18 December 2025, inviting councils in reorganisation areas where elections are planned for 2026 to give their views on potential postponement of local elections in their areas.
- 2.2 Agree one of the following as the preferred response, either:
  - a) Not to respond to the letter.
  - b) Respond with comments on the capacity to manage the transition to new unitary authorities by April 2028 and requests that local elections scheduled for May 2026 be postponed by one year.
  - c) Respond in support of local elections proceeding as planned in May 2026.
  - d) Respond clarifying that the decision on whether to postpone local elections by one year or proceed as scheduled is a matter for the Secretary of State
- 2.3. Subject to 2.2 above, delegate authority to the Leader of the Council to submit a response to the Minister's invitation by 15 January 2026.

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 In February 2025, the then Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution issued a statutory invitation to all councils in two-tier areas and neighbouring small unitary councils to develop proposals for unitary local government. Seven county-level areas were invited to respond as part of a Devolution Priority Programme and submit proposals for Local Government Reorganisation by the end of September 2025.
- 3.2 Stevenage Borough Council, along with the other 10 local authorities in Hertfordshire, were included in the next phase of Local Government Reorganisation. Councils from 14 different county areas, covering an estimated 134 local authorities, were invited to submit proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in their areas by 28 November 2025.
- 3.3 Cabinet met on 18 November 2025 and agreed its preferred option for Local Government Reorganisation, to be submitted to Government as part of an overall Hertfordshire submission by 28 November 2025.
- 3.4 Through the English Devolution White Paper, subsequent Ministerial Statements and guidance, the Government has indicated its intention for new



local authorities to be elected to in shadow form in May 2027 and to be fully established in April 2028 under ‘the most ambitious timeline’.

- 3.5 On 18 December 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness wrote to the 63 local Councils in the 14 county areas where local elections are scheduled in May 2026. The Letter invited councils to set out their views on the potential postponement of their local election in May 2026, whether doing this would allow them to better deliver local government reorganisation. MHCLG and the LGA have published Frequently Answered Question in response to a series of general queries related to May 2026 election postponement and can be found via: [Devolution and LGR FAQs: MHCLG | Local Government Association](#).
- 3.6 Through the Letter and a Ministerial Statement, the Minister confirmed that the Government remains committed to the indicative timetable that was published in July 2025, that sees elections to new councils in May 2027 and those councils going live in April 2028.
- 3.7 It recognised that LGR is a complex process and a significant number of proposals have been submitted for consideration with a relatively short timescale to design, transition and implement new unitary councils. The Letter also set out that the Government expects to undertake public consultation on LGR proposals for a period of seven weeks, from 5 February 2026.
- 3.8 Minister McGovern highlights within the Letter that a number of Councils have indicated there are constraints facing the sector, and that reorganisation also introduces additional work on top of existing challenges. The Minister notes that there have been some concerns expressed over the capacity to deliver a smooth and safe transition to new councils as well as running resource-intensive elections to councils who may be shortly abolished. A full copy of the letter is attached as Appendix A.
- 3.9 The Letter states that previous Governments have taken decisions to postpone local elections in areas contemplating and undergoing local government reorganisation to allow councils to focus their time and energy on the process.
- 3.10 The decision on whether to proceed with, or postpone, local elections is a matter for the Secretary of State who would confirm any postponement via an Order.
- 3.11 The correspondence to Councils suggests that the Secretary of State will use a locally-led approach and listen to local concerns. Minister McGovern has set out that councils are in the best position to judge the impact of potential postponements on their area, their capacity and any other relevant factors. Noting that capacity may vary in different local councils, and that local leaders are best placed to make assessments on the impact of LGR and potential postponements.
- 3.12 Councils are invited to respond by midnight on 15 January 2026 to set out their views on the postponement of your local election and if they consider this could release essential capacity to deliver local government reorganisation in an area and so allow reorganisation to progress effectively.
- 3.13 An initial public statement from the Leader of the Council to the Minister’s elections announcements was published on the Council’s website on 19



December, 2025 and can be found here: <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/news-and-events/news/mhclg-elections-announcement-response-statement>.

### **Previous Local Government Reorganisations and Local Elections**

- 3.14 A Ministerial Statement by the then Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon, in February 2025 noted that between 2019 and 2022, the previous government legislated to postpone 17 local council elections for one year during preparatory local government reorganisation work. For example, between 2019-2022, the previous government postponed elections in Buckinghamshire, Cumbria, North Yorkshire, Northamptonshire, Somerset, and Weymouth and Portland. In addition, research suggests that in some of the affected areas, some district-level elections were not due in the period of time between proposals being submitted to Government and decisions taken, because this period of time fell in a non-district election year.

### **Stevenage Borough Council elections**

- 3.15 Stevenage Borough Council held all out elections in May 2024, following an Electoral Review and subsequent adoption of new Ward boundaries. May 2026 will therefore be the first cycle of borough elections by thirds (or 13 electable seats), since those all out elections in May 2024.
- 3.16 This means that Councillors who represent the seats due for election in May 2026, will have served a 2 year term by May 2026.

### **Assessing capacity and local impacts**

- 3.17 The Secretary of State will consider the position of each council individually, weighing up the evidence received. This means that different decisions may be taken for different councils within the same area, depending on the representations received.
- 3.18 Councils are asked to make clear where, in their judgement, the capacity and resourcing issues in their area could impact their capacity to deliver local government reorganisation, to the Government published timescales.
- 3.19 Councils are asked to make any request for a postponement explicit, as this will of course be relevant in deciding whether postponement is necessary for a particular council.
- 3.20 If a Council does not make an explicit request or provide clear views and evidence in respect of their judgment on capacity, then the Secretary of State will take that into account and consider relevant evidence but it will clearly make the decision making process more difficult and the Secretary of State will be less likely to Order a delay, given the locally-led approach taken. It is ultimately up to councils how or whether they respond.
- 3.21 As mentioned earlier in the report, the decision on whether to postpone or proceed with local elections is solely a decision for the Secretary of State, not for a local authority. After the 15 January 2026 deadline, the Secretary of State will consider the position of each council individually, weighing up the views and evidence received. If the Secretary of State decides to postpone an election, legislation will be brought forward as soon as is practicable.



- 3.22 There is no single definition of capacity in this context, and there are potentially a number of factors for the Cabinet to consider. Arrangements were put in place to increase capacity during the recent 'submission' stage of the LGR process, including seconding a senior officer to lead the SBC project team, access to other internal team resources, extensive engagement with Members including Cabinet, wide consultation and work with local stakeholders.
- 3.23 Councils in Hertfordshire have been asked by the Herts Chief Executives Co-ordinating Group (CECG) to make budgetary provision to support LGR transition work. In response, the Draft General Fund Budget report to the January Cabinet will recommend allocating £560K in 2026/27 and a further £500K in 2027/28. These allocations are intended to enable preparatory work to commence in line with the timetable set out by the government, which anticipates the establishment of new unitary authorities by April 2028.
- 3.24 It is important to note that these recommended amounts do not represent the full transitional costs estimated in the three model submissions. Instead, they provide an initial allowance to begin essential planning and implementation activities. Further financial provision will be required as the programme develops and more detailed costings become available.
- 3.25 **Local Government Reorganisation submission.** The published submission from Hertfordshire authorities to Government (pgs120 – 121) highlighted several key transition risks and mitigations for this complex transition. This includes the extract below:
- **Effective leadership:** if there is a lack of clarity and efficiency on the leadership and decision-making arrangements during the transition process, this may delay implementation activities, increase costs and prevent effective oversight.
  - **Service continuity:** the existing Authorities deliver many vital services, often to vulnerable people. If transition and transformation do not minimise disruption, it may prevent the effective delivery of services and harm public confidence in the new Authorities.
  - **Complexity and pace of change:** lessons learnt from other similar programmes show that it is critical to start early, plan effectively and demonstrate strong leadership. Failure to do so will lead to time delays, cost overrun and an impact on service quality.
  - **Workforce capacity and morale:** the proposal will lead to significant changes for people across the existing organisations. While we believe the future offers significant opportunities, we recognise that if change is not managed effectively and the workforce not sufficiently engaged – this may damage staff morale, disrupt services and limit retention of the relevant skills and roles for the new organisation.
  - **Financial risk:** changes in the financial context either through wider economic changes, or specific changes in areas such as council tax base or transition costs result in the cost of LGR being higher than planned.
- 3.26 **Corporate Priorities.** The Council adopted a new Making Stevenage Better Corporate Plan 2024 – 2027, setting a range of ambitions and projects for the



town. A full version of the Plan is available online: [Appendix A - Making Stevenage Even Better 2024-2027](#). It includes projects such as the delivery of a new sports and leisure facility, commencing the Station Gateway project, investment into skills, ongoing delivery of the town centre regeneration programme, delivery of 1,000 new council homes including regeneration of the Oval, £249m investment into Councils homes, work in neighbourhoods, tackling climate change and delivering savings. Senior Leadership Team (SLT) capacity has been allocated to ensure the successful delivery of this ambitious programme of work.

- 3.27 **Delivery of local elections.** The Council has made appointments to the roles of Returning Officer (RO) and Electoral Registration Officer (ERO). The RO plays a central role in the democratic process, with their functions to ensure elections are administered effectively in accordance with the law, and that the experience of voters and those standing for election is a positive one. Their role is undertaken with impartiality to maintain the integrity of the election process. The duties of the RO are separate to their duties as a local government officer, and the RO is not responsible to the local authority but is directly accountable to the courts as an independent statutory office holder. The Council provides full support to the RO to deliver impartial and well managed elections. This is supported by a skilled Elections Team, with a full project plan and risk register in place, and regular oversight from the RO and Deputy Returning Officers (DROs).
- 3.28 A number of the Council's senior leadership team are anticipated to be actively involved in the delivery of local elections alongside the delivery of the Local Government Reorganisation programme.
- 3.29 As the Secretary of State has made no decisions regarding the timing of local elections in 2026, planning for the effective management of elections continues. Stevenage Borough Council has supported an application to participate in a Flexible Voting Pilot, which aims to provide greater choice and convenience for voters. However, at the point this report was published, the Secretary of State had not yet confirmed whether the pilot will proceed, with the necessary Statutory Orders intended to be in place and signed in January.
- 3.30 MHCLG has advised that Members may retire whenever they choose and their retirement would trigger a by-election in the usual way. Where a vacancy is to be filled at the May 2026 election, under the 'six month' rule, any Order to postpone those elections will also provide for the filling of such a vacancy.

#### **4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS**

- 4.1 As set out in the recommendations of this report (section 2.2) there are a range of options available.
- 4.2 It is recommended that Cabinet consider the four options outlined in this report and agree on its preferred response. This decision will ensure clarity on the Council's position regarding the timing of local elections and the approach to managing the transition to new unitary authorities.



- 4.3 A decision on whether to postpone local elections or proceed as planned is solely a matter for the Secretary of State. An alternative option to responding to the request, whether to note capacity concerns and request a delay, or to support elections proceeding, would be to provide no response at all. While the letter of 18 December 2025 states that the Secretary of State is only minded to make an Order to postpone elections for one year for those councils that raise capacity concerns, any response or non-response from the Cabinet will not be binding on the Secretary of State.

## **5 IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The cost of holding local elections in 2026 is estimated to be £155K based on the proposed 2026/27 budgets. However, given the timing of this and the expected Secretary of State's decision, some costs have been incurred before any formal determination is made.
- 5.2 In relation to Flexible Voting Pilots, funding for costs associated with the pilots will be provided by MHCLG. Indicative costings have already been submitted to MHCLG, and further costs will be identified through ongoing discussions between the Returning Officer and MHCLG should the local elections proceed in 2026.
- 5.3 As set out in paragraph 3.23, the Draft General Fund Budget report to the January 2026 Cabinet will recommend allocating £560K in 2026/27 and £500K in 2027/28 to support the transition to a new unitary authority. These amounts do not represent the full costs outlined in the three Hertfordshire submissions but provide an initial allowance to enable work to continue in line with the Government's timescale for LGR.

### **Legal Implications**

- 5.4 The division between executive and non-executive functions are provided for by the Local Government Act 2000 ("LGA 2000") and the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations ("the Functions Regulations"). Subject to any provision made by the LGA 2000 or subsequent enactments, all functions not specified in the Functions Regulations are the responsibility of the executive. The Letter invites authorities which consider that a postponement of elections is desirable, because of concerns about lack of sufficient capacity to manage both elections and the reorganisation process that the same time to set out their views to that effect by midnight on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2026.
- 5.5 The Council's Monitoring Officer sought urgent leading counsel (KC) advice and to whether responding to the Letter requesting a postponement is an executive or a non-executive decision. Counsel's view was that this would be an Executive decision. The power to make an order postponing (or changing the year of) elections under s87 of the LGA 200 is a power for the Secretary of State. There is no statutory provision which requires an affected authority to have requested the change.



- 5.6 In principle, anyone at all could make such a request, or the Secretary of State could act entirely of their own motion. It is simply as a matter of policy that the Secretary of State has in this instance indicated that he is likely to look for a request to have been made by the authority before considering the exercise of the s 87 power. The decision to postpone or proceed with the elections in May 2026 is solely a matter for the Secretary of State. Counsel has advised that they cannot see that in making a request for a postponement the Council would not be discharging any of the specific non-executive functions specified in the Functions Regulations.
- 5.7 Counsel has also advised that they do not consider that a decision to request a postponement of elections is itself key decision within the meaning of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012. This is because the Council is not taking the decision to postpone the elections, as said above, this is a decision which will be taken by the Secretary of State.

### **Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Implications**

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

### **Risk Implications**

- 5.9 Risks associated with the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) transition are detailed in section 3.25 of this report. Where mitigations are available, these have been set out within the Hertfordshire LGR submission to Government. These measures aim to address potential challenges relating to governance, service continuity, financial stability, and workforce capacity during the transition period.
- 5.10 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. When any election takes places, the effective management of an election is a priority for the RO, supported by the resources of the Council.

## **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

- BD1 Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan 2024 – 2027  
<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/about-the-council/plans-and-performance/corporate-plan-making-stevenage-even-better-2024-2027>
- BD2 Hertfordshire Local Government Reorganisation proposal: [Hertfordshire LGR Proposal.pdf](#)
- BD3 LGA/MHLCG FAQs: [Devolution and LGR FAQs: MHCLG | Local Government Association.](#)

## **APPENDICES**

- A Letter from Minister for Local Government and Homelessness, 18 December 2025





Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

**Alison McGovern MP**  
*Minister of State for Local Government  
and Homelessness*  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

To: Leaders of councils with elections  
in May 2026 where proposals for  
reorganisation have been submitted  
and decisions not yet taken

18 December 2025

Dear Leader,

I am writing to you regarding the elections your council is scheduled to hold on 7 May 2026.

This Government is determined to streamline local government by replacing the current two-tier system with new single-tier unitary councils, ending the wasteful two-tier premium. We are progressing this landmark reform quickly, which will be vital in delivering our vision: stronger local councils equipped to drive economic growth, improve local public services, and empower their communities. I am fully committed to ensuring councils can deliver new, sustainable structures within this Parliament.

We have now received proposals from all 20 remaining invitation areas, demonstrating strong collaboration between local partners. A consultation is open on 17 of those proposals from six invitation areas. I expect to launch a consultation in early February on proposals from the remaining 14 areas that seek to meet the terms of the 5 February statutory invitation. That consultation would be for seven weeks.

I remain committed to the indicative timetable that was published in July, that sees elections to new councils in May 2027 and those councils going live in April 2028. This is a complex process, and we will take decisions based on the evidence provided.

We have listened to councils telling us about the constraints they are operating within, and the work that reorganisation introduces on top of existing challenges. Now that we have received all proposals, it is only right that we listen to councils who are expressing concerns about their capacity to deliver a smooth and safe transition to new councils, alongside running resource-intensive elections to councils who may be shortly abolished. We have also received representations from councils concerned about the cost to taxpayers of holding elections to councils that are proposed to shortly be abolished.

Previous governments have postponed local elections in areas contemplating and undergoing local government reorganisation to allow councils to focus their time and energy on the process. We have now received requests from multiple councils to postpone their local elections in May 2026.

The Secretary of State recognises that capacity will vary between councils and that is why he has reached the position that, in his view, councils are in the best position to



judge the impact of potential postponements on your area and in the spirit of devolution and trusting local leaders, this Government will listen to you.

I am therefore inviting you, by midnight on Thursday 15 January, to set out your views on the postponement of your local election and if you consider this could release essential capacity to deliver local government reorganisation in your area and so allow reorganisation to progress effectively. For those who have already made their views known, we will be taking these into account. Views should be sent by email to [LGRElections@communities.gov.uk](mailto:LGRElections@communities.gov.uk).

The Secretary of State has adopted a locally-led approach. He is clear that should a council say they have no reason for postponement, then we will listen. But if you voice genuine concerns about your capacity, then we will take these concerns seriously. To that end, the Secretary of State is only minded to make an Order to postpone elections for one year for those councils who raise capacity concerns. A list of the relevant elections is annexed.

For areas where there are also scheduled town or parish council elections, the Secretary of State is minded to make no provision in the Order so these elections continue as scheduled, given town and parish councils are outside of local government reorganisation.

I appreciate that preparations for elections may have started, and you will be keen to have certainty, which we will deliver as soon as possible.

I am copying this letter to your Chief Executives, the other Leaders and Chief Executives of councils in the local government reorganisation programme, and to local MPs, Combined/Combined County Authority Mayors, Police and Crime Commissioners and Best Value Commissioners in local government reorganisation areas.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alison', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**ALISON MCGOVERN MP**

Minister of State for Local Government and Homelessness



**Annex – 63 councils with elections under consideration for postponement  
(there are 64 elections including that for the Mayor of Watford)**

1. Adur District Council
2. Basildon Borough Council
3. Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
4. Blackburn with Darwen Council
5. Brentwood Borough Council
6. Broxbourne Borough Council
7. Burnley Borough Council
8. Cambridge City Council
9. Cannock Chase District Council
10. Cheltenham Borough Council
11. Cherwell District Council
12. Chorley Borough Council
13. City of Lincoln Council
14. Colchester City Council
15. Crawley Borough Council
16. East Sussex County Council
17. Eastleigh Borough Council
18. Epping Forest District Council
19. Essex County Council
20. Exeter City Council
21. Fareham Borough Council
22. Gosport Borough Council
23. Hampshire County Council
24. Harlow District Council
25. Hart District Council
26. Hastings Borough Council
27. Havant Borough Council
28. Huntingdonshire District Council
29. Hyndburn Borough Council
30. Ipswich Borough Council
31. Isle of Wight Council
32. Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
33. Norfolk County Council
34. North East Lincolnshire Council
35. Norwich City Council
36. Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council
37. Oxford City Council
38. Pendle Borough Council
39. Peterborough City Council
40. Plymouth City Council
41. Portsmouth City Council
42. Preston City Council
43. Redditch Borough Council
44. Rochford District Council



45. Rugby Borough Council
46. Rushmoor Borough Council
47. South Cambridgeshire District Council
48. Southampton City Council
49. Southend-on-Sea City Council
50. St Albans City and District Council
51. Stevenage Borough Council
52. Suffolk County Council
53. Tamworth Borough Council
54. Three Rivers District Council
55. Thurrock Council
56. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
57. Watford Borough Council
58. Watford Borough Council Mayor
59. Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
60. West Lancashire Borough Council
61. West Oxfordshire District Council
62. West Sussex County Council
63. Winchester City Council
64. Worthing Borough Council



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