

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 17 February 2026

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Jim Brown (Chair), Philip Bibby, Stephen Booth, Peter Clark, Alistair Gordon, Lynda Guy, Ellie Plater and Ceara Roopchand

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

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sandra Barr, Robert Boyle, Leanne Brady, Kamal Choudhury, Akin Elekolusi and Andy McGuinness.

Councillor Ceara Roopchand declared an interest as she worked in the insolvency sector.

The Chair noted that attendance at Committees was important. The Chair asked if apologies could be communicated in good time and added that continuity of attendance was helpful, but reminded members that substitution was possible where absence was unavoidable.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 20 January 2026 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - FINAL GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2026/27

The Strategic Director (Chief Financial Officer, CFO) updated the Committee that the report did not reflect the final settlement, as this had only been received on 9 February 2026 and the CFO advised a verbal update was provided to Cabinet.

Members were advised that as part of the final settlement additional Government funding was made available nationally to ensure that no Councils were disadvantaged as a result of technical issues relating to the pooling of gains.

It was reported that, for the Council, the final settlement had resulted in a positive impact through additional ring-fenced funding of £83,000. It was noted that the CFO confirmed the outcome of the fair funding review was good news for Stevenage.

The CFO advised that the report to Council would include an update setting out the

differences between the provisional and final settlement, including the additional grant funding.

In response to questions, Officers explained that the budget allowed for an annual hard prune of areas across the town.

Questions were raised regarding the total amount provisioned for Local Government Reorganisation. The Committee were advised that while some work to date had been absorbed within existing staff resources, additional capacity is required across Hertfordshire.

Members were also informed that, as the programme moved into the transition phase, district and borough councils had collectively agreed to contribute £1 million over two years, alongside a £10 million contribution from the County Council. The funding would be required to support work up to the establishment of the shadow authority, which could not be delivered within existing resources.

Members sought assurance on how the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding was allocated. Members were advised that decisions were made through the established governance process, with strategic allocations approved by Cabinet. Officers explained they would provide a summary of CIL commitments and remaining balances in the 4th Quarter Monitoring report (Revenue and Capital). The Director of Planning and Regulation stated that there were limitations regarding what CIL monies could be spent on.

It was noted that if the CIL amount was above £75,000 it would go to Cabinet and if it was below this amount it would be delegated to the relevant Officer.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

4 PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - FINAL CAPITAL STRATEGY 2025/26 TO 2029/30

The Director of Finance presented the Final Capital Strategy 2025/26 to 2029/30. The Strategy confirmed a total investment of £118 million, including £7.9 million in approved growth bids.

It was noted that all 27 proposals listed in Appendix A were agreed by the cross-party Council Financial Scrutiny Group (CFSG).

A further CFSG meeting was held on 13 January 2026 to review unfunded capital bids, but these remained unsupported at this stage.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

5 PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - STEVENAGE BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN PARTIAL UPDATE: MAIN MODIFICATIONS FOLLOWING EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC HEARINGS

The Director of Planning and Regulation discussed the Local Plan Partial Review.

The report outlined the changes required by the Planning Inspectorate to ensure the plan was considered sound.

Questions were raised about the retail hierarchy, and Officers explained that the retail policy had not changed as part of this partial review and remained as set out in the adopted 2019 Local Plan.

Members asked about the target set for new homes to be built on previously developed land, and Officers explained that the wording had been reinstated following the Planning Inspector's direction to ensure the plans were sound. It was noted that this partial review did not change the overall housing target, and that wider housing capacity issues would be considered in a future full review of the plan.

Further questions focused on climate change policies, including the use of wording such as "aim to achieve," the removal of carbon offsetting references, and the shift from new developments to major developments.

Officers explained that these changes were required by the Planning Inspector to align the plan with national policy and to pass tests which were necessary to secure adoption of a legally compliant plan.

Members requested further information on the Council's approach to allocating Community Infrastructure Levy monies. The Director of Planning and Regulation set out that strategic monies were allocated through the existing Capital Spending Strategy but outlined that further information on the precise spending allocations would be provided separately.

The Head of Planning Policy agreed to send the Committee the definition of a major development and agreed to provide further clarification of offsetting to the Committee.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

6 PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2026/27

The Committee noted that Cabinet received the Annual Treasury Management Strategy for 2026/27, which set out how the Council would manage its borrowing, financing, investments and cash flows in accordance with the codes and guidance from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

It was noted that the Council remained compliant with all relevant legislation and that the ongoing importance of Member training and management of interest rates were emphasised.

Discussions took place regarding ethical investment, and it was explained that the Council's treasury investments were primarily short-term and largely comprised deposits with other local authorities, banks and money market funds.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

7 **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.

8 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

9 **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.

10 **PART II DECISION OF THE CABINET - WRITE OFFS OVER £10K**

The Director of Finance provided an update to the Committee regarding the Write Off's over £10,000 report.

The Committee asked a number of questions which officers responded to.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

11 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE CABINET - GRANT OF AN OPTION AGREEMENT FOR THE SALE OF LAND**

The CFO informed the Committee about the Grant of an Option Agreement for the sale of land.

The Committee asked a number of questions which officers responded to.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

12 **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.

13 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR