



COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday, 11 November 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Location: Council Chamber

**Contact: Gemma O'Donnell (01438) 242216
committees@stevenage.gov.uk**

Members: Councillors: E Plater (Chair), J Ashley-Wren (Vice-Chair), L Brady, K Choudhury, A Elekolusi, L Guy, D Kehoe, S Mead, C Veres and P Wilkins

AGENDA

PART 1

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - TUESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2025

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the Community Select Committee held on Tuesday 16 September 2025.

3 – 8

3. INTERIM REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF REVIEW OF EQUALITIES DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

To consider the interim report and recommendations of the Committee's review into Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion.

9 – 20

4. UPDATE ON THE COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2025-26

To consider the Committee's updated work programme for 2025-26.

21 – 30

5. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

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

6. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

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 ground 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.

7. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

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

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 16 September 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Ellie Plater (Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren (Vice-Chair),
Kamal Choudhury, Sarah Mead, Carolina Veres and Peter Wilkins

Start / End Start Time: 6:00pm
Time: End Time: 7:45pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Leanne Brady, Akin Elekolusi, Lynda Guy and Mason Humberstone.

2 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - THURSDAY 3 JULY 2025**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Community Select Committee meeting held on 3 July 2025 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **UPDATE ITEM ON SBC SOCIAL HOUSING DAMP AND MOULD**

The Assistant Director of Building Safety and Housing Property Services delivered a presentation and update on damp and mould in social housing.

Members received information on the causes of damp and mould. This included moisture sources, building and environmental conditions and occupant behaviour. Members were also informed on the mitigating factors such as controlling moisture, improved ventilation, managing temperature and insulation, using appropriate materials and finishes and adopting good occupant practices.

The Committee was presented with the service performance data for damp and mould inspections completed between April and July 2025. It was reported that 97% of all cases raised had been completed, with 89% of these completed within the internal target of 10 working days. Officers noted that four inspections remained outstanding, three of which were overdue due to access issues.

It was highlighted that the number of inspections increased in July 2025, coinciding with the release of information regarding Awaab's Law. Members were also shown a comparison with performance trends from the previous year, as well as data on repeat cases and the tracking of live cases.

Members were presented with a comparison of the performance trends of the previous year.

Repeat cases and the current tracking of live cases was noted.

The new legislation for Damp and Mould was presented to the Committee as a process flow chart and it was noted that Awaab's Law would be introduced to the Social Housing Act 2023 from 27 October 2025. The timeframes for when work would need to complete by was noted.

The Committee was informed of the composition of the damp and mould team, and it was noted that one surveyor post remained vacant. Reviews of the damp and mould policy, housing asset management processes, and the no access policy (in conjunction with the compliance team) were reported.

The Assistant Director advised that the average cost per case was £1,150. Monthly monitoring would continue as officers anticipated knock-on impacts from the forthcoming legislation.

In response to a question regarding emergency repairs, officers confirmed that the definition was contained within the Repairs and Maintenance Policy, available on the Stevenage Borough Council website. Members suggested that clearer photographic examples of emergency cases would be useful and officers noted that such cases were assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Questions were raised regarding communication between the Council and tenants, and Members stressed the importance of contractor accountability where works were incomplete. Officers explained that under the new contract, contractors would be measured against KPIs, which will be monitored and reported monthly as part of contract management arrangements.

In response to questions, officers confirmed that tenants received a written report with advice following inspections, which tenants signed to acknowledge receipt and understanding. It was also confirmed that surveyors' qualifications formed part of the recruitment process to ensure staff competence.

Officers clarified that, should the budget be exceeded, additional resources would need to be identified to support residents. Quotes for works were secured from the relevant appointed contractor(s) by the Damp and Mould team, with competitive rates applied as a result of a recent procurement process, and post-inspections carried out.

In response to a question from the Chair regarding the effectiveness of Awaab's Law, officers noted that it would enable clearer mapping of required actions and timeframes, as well as providing evidence of compliance.

The Chair also queried why budgets had been higher in previous years. Officers explained that overall expenditure should reduce over time as preventative measures addressed the root causes of damp and mould.

The Chair asked whether the retrofitting of properties had reduced cases of damp and mould. Officers advised that it was too early to determine the impact and that further work was needed to improve data collection on the housing stock. A clearer numerical understanding of reported cases would enable more targeted and effective action to address the issue.

The chair thanked officers for their contributions to the meeting.

4 **TENANT ENFORCEMENT & TENANCY AUDITS**

The Head of Housing Operations introduced the item and explained the reasons for undertaking tenancy audits. This included supporting tenant well-being, detecting fraud and facilitating collaborative working.

An explanation of the Social Regulation Act 2023 and consumer standards was provided. It was noted that the Act had granted stronger powers to inspect and enforce standards to tenants.

The Committee were shown the step-by-step process of how a tenancy audit was carried out. Housing Officers issued an appointment letter to the tenant advising of the date and time of the audit and then contacting the tenant again to confirm availability. The visit was then undertaken, during which any necessary repairs would be identified and raised.

Officers explained the outcomes of tenancy audits, noting that these allowed follow up actions when required. Referrals to other teams were also made where necessary.

It was reported that a target of 160 tenancy audits per month had been set. Between January and August 2025, 15% of audits were unable to be completed due to access not being granted. Members were also advised of the enforcement process that followed where access was not given after multiple attempts.

Members were informed of trends identified through tenancy audits, such as unauthorised works undertaken by tenants and household details not being kept up to date.

Members were shown photographs of unauthorised works undertaken by a tenant, with a significant volume of waste presented at the property. Officers arranged for an engineer to visit and provide advice, and the tenants were decanted from the property. The cost of the works was recharged to the tenant. Further photographs were shown from a separate tenancy audit where no concerns were identified, and it was confirmed that a subsequent audit would be scheduled in three years' time.

At this juncture, it was noted that access rates had declined in December 2024 due to school holidays and limited tenant availability. The no access process was applied to support entry where required.

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation and thanked the former Chair of

Community Select for the work previously undertaken, which had enabled the current arrangements to be established.

A question was raised as to whether the audits were focused on one area or undertaken across the town. Officers explained that audits were informed by data indicating where residents had not booked a repair for some time or had limited contact. This approach was applied to all Right to Buy properties.

Members commented on safeguarding issues which the Housing Officers may encounter during Tenancy Audits. Officers advised that Housing Officers had received the appropriate training to report any concerns, enabling the Council to support both tenants and officers.

Members also commented on the standard of properties once they had been taken over from voids, and officers noted that a review of the lettable standards was currently underway. Tenants would also receive a survey to identify any concerns.

A question was raised regarding drug use within council properties, and officers confirmed this was a breach of tenancy agreements. and noted that significant evidence was needed to progress further. They explained that significant evidence was required to take further action, and letters could be issued to flat blocks to advise residents that the Council was aware of the issue.

Officers confirmed that a new Resident Engagement Manager had been appointed and that new communications to educate tenants would be introduced. It was noted that further messaging would be promoted through the Council's social media channels.

It was noted that the Tenancy Audits would also provide insight into instances of overcrowding and under-occupancy within properties.

In response to a question on the no access policy, officers advised that this would now take into account stock conditions, compliance and non-access for repairs to make sure the relevant teams are notified.

It was noted that consideration was being given to the introduction of an automated text messaging system to provide residents with notification of the timeframes for Housing Officer visits.

Officers noted that the work of the ASB team could be reported to committee regarding how cases were triaged and addressed.

The Chair thanked officers for their contributions to the meeting.

5 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

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.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR

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Item no:



Meeting: COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

Portfolio Area: Equalities and Young People

Date: 11 NOVEMBER 2025

INTERIM REPORT AND EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF EQUALITIES, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Author – Stephen Weaver Ext No.2332
Lead Officer – Kerry Clifford Ext No.
Contact Officer – Stephen Weaver Ext No.2332

Contributors – Councillor Sarah Mead, Chair of Community Select Committee (for 2024-25); Councillor Ellie Platter, Chair of Community Select Committee (for 2025-26); Assistant Director, Kerry Clifford; and Daryl Jedowski

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider the draft report and recommendations of the Community Select Committee Scrutiny, looking at the Council's Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion offer.

2 BACKGROUND & SCRUTINY ISSUE IDENTIFIED

- 2.1 The issue of scrutinising the way the Council supports Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion in Stevenage was agreed by the Select Committee as a scrutiny review item when it met on 29 February 2024, and this choice was confirmed by the Committee when it reconsidered their work programme on 13 June 2024.

2.2 Scope and Focus of the review

2.2.1 The scope for the review was agreed when the Committee met on Wednesday 8 January 2024. [Community Select Committee - 8 January 2025 - ED&I Presentation](#) It was agreed that the scope should include a focus on:

- Are the public aware of various cultural events that separate ethnic communities hold? Perhaps a review might encourage various diverse groups to come forward and put on their own cultural events.
- Previously the World Forum had arranged a diversity calendar that was promoted by former Cllr Sherma Batson which had been a good vehicle for breaking down barriers. Could this be looked at with the World Forum or the Equalities Commission Legacy Group?
- How does the Council celebrate and help promote the 9 Characteristic groups of the diversity Act 2010 throughout the year?
- The Council's Strategic Leadership Team be asked to share how planning/regeneration affects people with disabilities as they move about the town. What is movement around the town like for wheelchair users and visually impaired?
- The review should address the cultural diversity with the town's LGBTQ+ community. The Council's role is seen as to support not to lead by arranging events. This year's Stevenage Day had a specific LGBTQ+ Pride focus.
- Is there still inappropriate/derogatory language used towards disabled people or used in a pejorative way to able-bodied people in schools?
- Is there still as problem with deep seated racism and what can be done to counter and challenge this?
- A possible recommendation could be that there is a cultural event celebrating Stevenage diversity.
- Can the information boards around the town centre be used to promote the Council's own events and social inclusion?

2.3 Process of the review

2.3.1 The Committee met on 2 occasions and the Chair and Vice-Chair met informally with officers to discuss and undertake the review as follows: On 8 & 29 January 2025. Following the evidence gathering the Committee were invited to consider the interim report and draft recommendations at its meeting on 11 November 2025.

2.3.2 The Committee interviewed the following witnesses:

- Corporate Policy and Research Officer, Charlotte Bott
- Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, Daryl Jedowski
- Council's Officer Lead on the Stevenage Equalities Commission, Gemma Maret
- Community Development Officer, Oonagh Sherlock
- Chair of the Stevenage Equalities Commission, Errol John
- Chair of Stevenage World Forum, Kate Belinis
- Director Junction 7 Creatives, John Prebble, Stevenage Pride Member

- Coco Brinda, Stevenage Pride Member
- Lorna Scardifield, Age Concern
- Stevenage Youth Mayor, Lahaina Sutherland
- Sharn Tomlinson, CEO of Mind in Mid Herts
- Alison MacDougall, and Paula McGuinness volunteers for Hertfordshire Vision Loss

3 THE COMMITTEES FINDINGS

3.1 Conclusions of the Community Select Committee re scrutiny of the Council's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion offer

3.1.1 Following the formal meetings of the Committee 8 and 29 January 2025, where Members received officer presentations on the corporate support for Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion in the town and where the Committee interviewed various representative groups a number of observations were made by Members and are detailed below, which have led to the recommendations in the report at section 4.

3.2 Race and Ethnicity

3.2.1 The Committee spoke to Chair of the Stevenage Equalities Commission, Errol John and the Chair of Stevenage World Forum, Kate Belinis. The Committee were advised that a consistent theme across the Equalities Commissions priorities was fostering greater community engagement. The Chair (Stevenage World Forum) emphasised the need to involve a more diverse range of people in leadership roles, such as school governors, magistrates, and other public offices, through initiatives like the citizenship programme with Operation Black Votes. The group had also been working on ways to connect with new residents and encourage broader participation.

3.2.2 Efforts to increase both individual and community capacity were discussed, including:

- Hosting conferences and events that attracted significant participation.
- Creating accessible resources for the community, such as spaces to meet and tools for engagement.
- Reviving initiatives like the “Celebrate” programme, which historically brought people together for community-building activities.

3.2.3 Members emphasised the importance of coaching and confidence-building for individuals, particularly for those engaging in public speaking and leadership roles.

3.2.4 Members advocated for visible recognition of past contributors, like Sherma Batson, to inspire future generations and ensure the legacy of their efforts.

3.2.5 The Chair (Stevenage World Forum) called for increased collaboration with councillors and the wider community to strengthen and sustain the

Commission's initiatives with an annual or bi-annual event with Members and Equalities Commission legacy group organising seminars, conferences, or similar events to connect with key community groups. These initiatives could help raise awareness about the council's role, build relationships, and foster trust. The Chair of the Equalities Commission Legacy Group highlighted the importance of ongoing efforts to bridge the "institutional ignorance" and "communal ignorance" that hindered effective engagement.

3.2.6 There was a discussion about addressing barriers to access, such as:

- Introducing priority lanes for individuals with disabilities.
- Ensuring the availability of translated documents for non-English speakers.
- Considering ways to address literacy issues, which, while not a protected characteristic, presented significant barriers to communication and engagement.

3.2.7 The Chair highlighted the critical importance of effective communication. Once residents were informed about services and opportunities, they were more likely to engage.

3.3 **LGBTQ+**

3.3.1 The Committee spoke to Coco Brinda and John Prindle who shared feedback from various LGBTQ+ groups that had avoided Stevenage Day in the past due to its lack of representation and perceived negative connotations. Previously they had felt excluded and unwelcome, with little visibility for their community. However, the Pride Area at Stevenage Day 2024 changed this narrative, providing a platform for inclusivity and breaking down long-standing barriers.

3.3.2 Both speakers acknowledged the crucial role of Stevenage Borough Council in supporting the initiative. They emphasised the need to ensure the progress made at Stevenage Day continued, with more representation and visibility for the LGBTQ+ community at future events

3.3.3 The Committee heard that young trans people in the community faced significant challenges, including societal hostility, misinformation, and lack of legal recognition for non-binary identities. Specific concerns were highlighted regarding barriers to changing legal documents, such as birth certificates, to align with chosen identities. Recent government decisions had resisted simplifying these processes, exacerbating difficulties for trans individuals

3.3.4 Members highlighted the importance of trans representation in discussions and events, emphasising the value of hearing lived experiences to address misconceptions and combat hatred.

3.3.5 The Co-Director (Junction 7) expressed concerns about the sustainability of grassroots initiatives, particularly the reliance on a few dedicated individuals.

The importance of ensuring longevity and support for projects like Pride and other community-led events was emphasised.

3.4 Older People

- 3.4.1 The Committee spoke to Lorna Scardifield, Age Concern. Lorna provided insights into the support available for older people and discussed the provision of benefit advice and housing options, highlighting the importance of face-to-face interactions. Lorna identified a number of key priorities for older individuals, such as the need for more benches in the town due to the relocation of the bus interchange. Additionally, she mentioned that Age Concern was in the process of moving to a new location, managed by Hertfordshire County Council, and they were awaiting further updates on the transition but would remain open from Wednesday to Saturday.
- 3.4.2 Lorna advised that a current concern related to the impact of the recent cut to the Winter Fuel Payment, which had caused significant worry among older residents. Before Christmas, Age Concern had experienced a surge in residents seeking advice about the changes. A major barrier was that many older people were unable to access online services, leading them to seek in-person support.
- 3.4.3 The Chair acknowledged the concerns around digital exclusion and mobility issues. It was suggested that this issue be noted as a recommendation for consideration by the Environment and Economy Select Committee.
- 3.4.4 Lorna informed the Committee that there had been plans to provide a mobility scooter hire service from the bus station, with a designated storage facility proposed at the side of the station. However, due to changes in Council staff supporting the project, the plans had not moved forward.
- 3.4.5 A member of the Committee expressed concern upon discovering these plans had not moved forward and suggested that this should be recorded as a specific recommendation for the review. Subject to funding being available to support such a project, officers would investigate what would be required to create a mobility buggy storage and hire options from the bus interchange.
- 3.4.6 At this juncture, discussions took place regarding the number of mobility scooters available at Age Concern. It was noted that they previously had nine scooters when based in Swingate but now had five due to a reduction in space. It was also noted the main need was for suitable locations, rather than acquiring additional scooters.
- 3.4.7 The Committee commended the efforts of the Age Concern team, particularly highlighting the opportunity for people to test different types of scooters and walkers. A question was raised regarding restrictions on selling second-hand mobility scooters. It was clarified that due to the organisation's public liability insurance policy, they were only able to purchase new mobility scooters.

3.5 **Young People**

- 3.5.1 The Committee spoke to Lahaina Sutherland, Stevenage Youth Mayor, who addressed matters concerning young people of Stevenage. She invited open questions from the group, focusing on topics such as education and equality. The Youth Mayor shared her experiences as a young person in Stevenage studying while also working part-time.
- 3.5.2 The Committee heard that Stevenage offered strong part-time job opportunities for young people, with a well-established network for employment access. However, a key barrier to employment was the lack of preparation for entering the workforce, particularly in interview skills and workplace expectations. The Youth Mayor suggested that schools should allocate more time to developing these skills and recommended that workshops be held to support students in this area.
- 3.5.3 Regarding mental health support, the Youth Mayor praised the resources available in Stevenage, particularly the Young People's Healthy Hub. She highlighted that mental health coordinators in schools were well-informed about available support programs, making it easier for students to access help when needed.
- 3.5.4 The Committee questioned the level of engagement that young people had with the Council and the services it provided. It was noted that a perceived gap existed between younger people and the Council, which the Youth Mayor aimed to address during her term. The Youth Mayor advised that she had already visited primary schools across the town and planned further visits before the next Youth Mayor's inauguration in May 2025. The Youth Mayor believed it was important for young people to understand that they could have their voices heard at the Council level and proposed holding assemblies or workshops in schools to raise awareness of Council services and improve accessibility.
- 3.5.5 In response to a question regarding the most effective way for the Council to engage with young residents, the Youth Mayor highlighted the importance of a strong social media presence, as it was a primary communication platform for young people. However, she also emphasised the value of face-to-face interactions, such as guest speakers at school events, which could offer more meaningful engagements.
- 3.5.6 When asked about what was most lacking for young people in Stevenage, the Youth Mayor identified the need for greater access to extracurricular activities, particularly sports clubs, to encourage social interaction and personal development. She also emphasised the importance of employment opportunities to help young people gain experience, build confidence, and prepare for future careers.
- 3.5.7 Responding to a question about cost barriers for young people, the Youth Mayor acknowledged that financial constraints were a significant factor. The importance of supporting economically disadvantaged young people was

emphasised to ensure equal opportunities. The Chair also highlighted the role of support within the home in encouraging and championing young people.

- 3.5.8 A Member asked the Youth Mayor about the biggest change she had experienced growing up in Stevenage and what improvements she would like to see. A discussion followed regarding the rise in antisocial behaviour (ASB), attributed to increased social media use and a lack of community cohesion. It was suggested that greater access to extracurricular activities could help address this issue by providing a sense of inclusion and belonging.
- 3.5.9 When asked about the biggest pressures on young people, the Youth Mayor identified two key concerns. The first was the impact of social media, particularly regarding body image stigma, which could negatively affect mental health. The second was academic pressure, especially the lack of support for young people not pursuing university education. However, it was noted that exam-related pressures had improved through adjustments to exam conditions for those who needed additional support.

3.6 **Age Friendly Communities**

- 3.6.1 The Committee received a presentation from the Council's Community Development Officer on Age Friendly Communities in Stevenage. The initiative aimed to streamline services, improve support for older residents and create funding and knowledge sharing opportunities with other Age-Friendly Communities (AFC).
- 3.6.2 The Committee was informed that achieving Age Friendly Community status involved collaboration with the Centre for Better Aging (CFBA) to understand the criteria and benefits. Stevenage was awarded AFC status in February 2024 and was working with Hertfordshire County Council and Age UK on implementation. An Age Friendly Survey had been conducted, with results expected by the end of March 2025.
- 3.6.3 The Community Development Officer outlined the Take a Seat campaign, which aimed to increase seating in Stevenage to promote rest and community engagement. The initiative would include making street furniture more accessible, such as benches with backs and arms for support. A task and finish group would also be formed to lead specific age friendly projects, replacing the Older People's Network. Additionally, the work would include collaboration with Dementia-Friendly Stevenage to address age-related issues, including dementia care.

3.7 **Disability – Mental Health**

- 3.7.1 The Committee spoke to Sharn Tomlinson, CEO of Mind in Mid Herts.
- 3.7.2 The Committee were informed about the connection between mental health, disability, and neurodivergent communities. It was highlighted that individuals

on the autistic spectrum were nine times more likely to take their own life. Many people without a formal diagnosis of autism or learning difficulties faced social isolation, which significantly impacted their mental health. In addition to dementia-friendly initiatives, the need for a more inclusive, neurodivergent-friendly community was emphasised.

- 3.7.3 The Committee acknowledged that greater collaboration between the Council and external mental health experts would improve service delivery and noted this as an area for development.

3.8 **Disability - Sight loss**

- 3.8.1 The Committee spoke to Alison MacDougall, a volunteer for Hertfordshire Vision Loss. Alison outlined her role in establishing the Stevenage Sight-Life. She highlighted the challenges faced by individuals with sight loss, particularly regarding transport accessibility. She emphasised the importance of public transport, especially the bus services and station, in maintaining independence.
- 3.8.2 Paula McGuinness shared her personal experience of living with a sight impairment and the difficulties of navigating public spaces, particularly uneven pavements. Concerns were raised about the safety of electric bikes and scooters on pavements, and members requested that the issue be addressed in collaboration with community policing to improve regulation and enforcement. A request was also made for high-visibility markings on bollards to enhance safety visually impaired residents. The accessibility of council leaflets was also discussed, with a recommendation to use high-contrast text and background. Additionally, poor street lighting was identified as a barrier to mobility.
- 3.8.3 It was noted that Stevenage Sight-Life had met with a representative from the Thomas Pocklington Trust, which had been conducting accessibility assessments at local train stations, including Stevenage and Luton Parkway. Several accessibility improvements were identified, such as the introduction of an audio descriptive guide and enhanced safety measures, including CCTV monitoring for vulnerable passengers.
- 3.8.4 A member of the Stevenage Sight-Life group, raised concerns about the accessibility and communication challenges faced by sight-impaired passengers at Stevenage Bus Station. The Sight-Life group suggested implementing a tannoy system to announce bus arrivals and bay changes. Sight-Life acknowledged the assistance they received from residents during journeys on public transport in Stevenage. Additionally, concerns were raised about poor signage between the train and bus stations, making it difficult for visually impaired passengers to read signs and identify buses.
- 3.8.5 The importance of these discussions was highlighted, with reference for the need for an officer as a point of contact. The Community Development Officer also discussed connecting the group with the Voluntary Community Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE).

- 3.8.6 A suggestion was made for a walkabout with councillors alongside representatives of the Sight-Life group to help them better understand the challenges faced by people with sight loss. It was acknowledged that such an initiative could be possible but would depend on the specific needs of the participants. It was suggested that sighted guides be present to assist during any walkabout.
- 3.8.7 It was noted that while the Council could advocate for improvements and would ask for an update from the Environment and Economy Select Committee on the issues regarding the bus interchange that Hertfordshire Vision Loss had originally raised with the Committee, and would communicate concerns to relevant transport bodies, it did not directly manage or commission bus services, so had limited influence over the bus operators.

3.9 **Next steps**

- 3.9.1 The Committee are asked whether there are any other areas of the 9 protected characteristic groups that requires a detailed focus on before concluding this work programme item?
- 3.9.2 The Committee will receive an update on the Council Cultural Strategy at its next iteration and following this session Members could make recommendations on the strategy with a renewed emphasis on diversity and inclusivity.

4 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 That the Community Select Committee agrees the conclusions of the report as well as the recommendations below and that these will be presented to the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Equalities & Diversity and that a response be provided from these and any other named officers and partners within two months of the publishing of this report.
- 4.2 **Recommendation 1- working with the local community to encourage a more diverse range of people involved in leadership roles:**
- 4.2.1 The Cabinet Portfolio holder for Equalities and Officers be recommended to work with community leaders and the diverse local community to ensure a more diverse range of people can be involved in leadership roles, such as school governors, magistrates, and other public offices, working with initiatives like the citizenship programme with Operation Black Votes.
- 4.3 **Recommendation 2 – Increased collaboration between Members and the Equalities Commission Legacy Group:**

- 4.3.1 That the Assistant Director Housing and Neighbourhoods be recommended to work with Members to encourage their involvement in an annual or bi-annual event with the Equalities Commission legacy group and the wider community to strengthen and sustain the Commission's initiatives.
- 4.4 **Recommendation 3 – The voices and lived experience of the trans community are heard in discussions and at events to help combat misconceptions and hatred:**
- 4.4.1 That officers and Members ensure that the voices of the trans community are heard in discussions and events, hearing people's lived experience to help address misconceptions and combat hatred.
- 4.5 **Recommendation 4 – carry out an audit of the provision of benches and seating in the town centre:**
- 4.5.1 That the Assistant Director Planning and Regulation carry out an audit of the provision of benches and seating in the town centre to ensure there is enough seating for older people and those with mobility issues.
- 4.6 **Recommendation 5 – Address concerns around digital exclusion for older people be addressed:**
- 4.6.1 That the Assistant Director Business Change be invited to address the concerns raised by input from Age Concern regarding the digital exclusion of some of the local community's older people.
- 4.7 **Recommendation 6 – Address concerns raised by Age Concern around the lack of provision of mobility scooter hire service from the bus interchange:**
- 4.7.1 Age Concern reminded Members that there were originally plans to locate a mobility scooter hire service from the bus interchange. This had not been possible. Members requested that subject to funding being available to support such a project, officers to investigate what would be required to create a mobility buggy storage and hire options from the bus interchange.
- 4.8 **Recommendation 7 – Address the needs of young people by supporting extracurricular activities in schools and in the community via sports, interests and social clubs:**
- 4.8.1 Members recommended that the Council, and specifically Members via their Local Community Budgets, support young people in relation to combating mental health needs with greater access to extracurricular activities, particularly sports clubs, mentoring to encourage social interaction and personal development.

4.9 **Recommendation 8 – To address support for neurodiversity encourage better collaboration between the Council and external mental health experts:**

4.9.1 Members are recommending greater collaboration between the Council and external mental health experts would improve service delivery and noted this as an area for development.

4.10 **Recommendation 9 – Address the needs of the sight loss community:**

4.10.1 Members recommend supporting the sight loss community with high-visibility markings on bollards to enhance safety visually impaired residents. In addition, the accessibility of council leaflets should be addressed with the use high-contrast text and background to help the visually impaired.

5.1 Legal Implications

5.1.1 There are no direct legal implications for this report.

5.2 Equalities Implications

5.2.1 The review and the report are focused on Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion.

APPENDICES:

None

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

[CSC - Equalities Diversity & Inclusion Scoping Document](#)

[CSC 8 January 2025 - Officer Presentation](#)

[CSC Meeting 29 January 2025](#)

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Lead AD	AD Housing & Neighbourhoods, Kerry Clifford
Deputy	AD Building Safety & Housing Property Services, Denise Lewis
Chair	Cllr Ellie Plater
Vice-Chair	Cllr Julie Ashley-Wren

Community Select Committee Scrutiny Work Programme 2025-26

(Including main review items, one-off meetings, statutory and standing items, review revisits and policy development items)

The work programme is the main guide to the Committee's work throughout the year. However individual items can be raised at Committee meetings and consider as one-off items on a case-by-case basis at future meetings.

Scrutiny Review items 2025/26: (Main review, one-off updates, briefings etc.)	Strategic Director, Assistant Director, Lead Officer(s) & Portfolio Holder	Provisional meeting date(s) identified	Other details: i.e. (i) Number of meetings item can be covered in? (ii) Whether scoping required? (iii) Expectation/ style of meeting & (iv) other details	Comment by lead Assistant Director/Deputy	Chair/Vice-Chair Preference & Priority
<u>Progress of the new Housing Allocations policy</u>	AD Housing & Neighbourhoods, Kerry Clifford, Head of	Meeting in the Autumn (Sep/Oct 2025) ahead of report to Cabinet	(i) This should be covered in a single meeting	A one-off update to CSC Members providing balance between affordability criteria and	

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Page 22	Community Advice, Sarah Pateman, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing, Cllr Jackie Hollywell.	in December 2025. Tuesday 21 October 2025 To be advised – report to Cabinet has been delayed	(ii) No scope required.	the Council's statutory responsibilities as a Social Housing Provider.	
	<u>Tenant enforcement/ tenancy Audits</u> AD Housing & Neighbourhoods, Kerry Clifford, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing, Cllr Jackie Hollywell & Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Tenancy Involvement, Cllr Nigel Williams	Tuesday 16 September 2025	(i) This should be covered in a single meeting (ii) No scope required.	AD Housing & Neighbourhoods has suggested that there is a need for a Tenancy Audit Policy – to provide a procedure for staff and a policy for tenants so all parties know what is expected)	Vice-Chair, Tenancy Audits can throw up potential safeguarding issues.
<u>One-off update item on Housing Damp & Mould</u>	AD Building Safety and Property Services, Denise	Tuesday 16 September 2025 – Officer Briefing	(i) This should be covered in a single meeting	Members to receive an update on Damp & Mould – AD Housing &	If possible, Members have indicated they would like to receive

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Page 23	Lewis, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing, Cllr Jackie Hollywell.	ahead of legislation changes in Oct 2025.	(ii) No scope required.	Neighbourhoods suggested a briefing could be provided to Members in August/Sep ahead of Awabb's Law coming into effect Oct 2025.	information on: • a flow chart as a reference point to see what stage case are in the process. • Info on repeat cases and the tracking of live cases. • Info on factors that affect damp and mould in properties such as cost of living; keeping heating on low and constant; better ventilation; overcrowding.
	<u>Equalities & Diversity</u> (Initially a one-off meeting, but could lead to a main review)	Interim report 11 November 2025 - Final Report - tbc	(i) Final meetings of the review – It is likely that the review would be brought to 2 Committee	A Member briefing and written briefing note is being prepared to be shared with CSC Members on	Ongoing – bring the final report to CSC in 2025-26 Municipal Year The Chair asked if the review could receive an

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Page 24	Manager, Daryl Jedowski, Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities including Equalities, Cllr Coleen De Freitas.		meetings, (i) a draft report and receive an update on the Council's cultural strategy; and (ii) Final report.	Community Cohesion. Officers can bring an update on the existing cultural strategy to a future meeting. Which could include an invitation to the new Cabinet Portfolio holder, Cllr Simon Speller. Beyond this a more detailed piece on the Council's Cultural Strategy (2018-2028) could be included in a future CSC work programme/Municipal Year as the Strategy is in need of a refresh.	update on the Council Cultural Strategy and following this Members could make recommendations on the strategy with a renewed emphasis on diversity and inclusivity. Take on the offer from the partially sighted community to walk around the town – this is in hand with the Cabinet Portfolio for Equalities. Members are looking forward to receiving an all-Member seminar on Community Cohesion – including details of the

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					emerging Resettlement Action Plan.
<u>Older People</u> Page 25	AD Housing & Neighbourhoods, Kerry Clifford, Health & Sport Strategy Manager, Ryan Ansell, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Neighbourhoods and Older People, Cllr Myla Arceno	To be advised.	This could be the focus of one meeting of the Committee.	Officers can provide a session focusing on Older People – including the Council’s policies on: • Age Friendly Community & Age Friendly Conference • Dementia Friendly Community • Digital exclusion • How older people access our services • Housing for Older People (this could be a separate larger piece of work to a future work	The Chair has previously outlined the challenges faced by older people in relation to digital exclusion.

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				programme/Municipal Year)	
<u>Community Centre's</u> Page 26	AD Housing & Neighbourhoods, Kerry Clifford, Strategic Director and Statutory Section 151 Officer, Clare Fletcher Cabinet Member with responsibility for Co-operative Council, Cllr Nigel Williams.	To be advised – possibly a briefing note that could be considered at a meeting of the Committee.	Possibly one meeting with potential to lead to further meetings.	The Assistant Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods has agreed to liaise with the Council's Section 151 Officer regarding the status of the current policy and would provide feedback to Members.	Members requested an update on the future of Community Centres, specifically regarding the Play Centre and Pavilion at St Nicholas Park.
<u>Statutory Item – Crime & Disorder Committee</u>	AD Stevenage Direct Services, Lead Officer Sarah Pateman, Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities – Cllr Tom Plater	Meeting to be scheduled for <u>March 2026</u> .	(ii) Yes, covered in one meeting (ii) No scope required (iii) Interviews with Chair of RAG, Herts Constabulary,	The annual meeting this year could provide an opportunity to highlight the work of joint working with the Police and the strategies and work of the SoSafe Partnership.	The Chair has asked if there could be a profile on the Council's work regarding Anti-Social Behaviour.

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Page 27			Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Community Safety looking at past performance of the Community Safety Action Plan and future priorities		
<u>Standing Item - Public Health</u>	AD Housing & Neighbourhoods, Kerry Clifford, and Health & Sports Strategy Manager, Ryan Ansell, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Wellbeing, Cllr Simon Speller	<u>Jan/Feb 2026.</u>	(i) Yes, covered in one meeting (ii) No scope required (iii) Interviews with the HCC Director of Public Health, SBC Executive Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Public Health and the SD for Community. (iv) Other Members to	Members indicated that they previously valued the sessions with the HCC Director of Public Health and would like to reinstate these meetings with focus on general health and wellbeing and specifically on Health Inequalities for Stevenage.	Public Health remains a priority. The Chair has suggested inviting a representative from the Hertfordshire Health Scrutiny to speak to the Committee about health and wellbeing statistics specific to Stevenage. In addition, officers have previously confirmed they

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Page 28			be invited – SBC Rep on HCC Health Scrutiny Cttee.	The HCC Director of Public Health (or a Member of the HCC Public Health Team) be invited to update Members on the NHS Integrated Care Boards (which have replacing Clinical Commissioning Groups) and on matters relating to Public Health and Stevenage (if possible including the “tartan rug” the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment)	would invite a member of the Hertfordshire County Council Public Health team to attend a future meeting to further explore this topic. The importance of promoting health and wellbeing awareness across Stevenage has been emphasised, and the Chair has highlighted that increasing awareness could support residents in making more informed decisions about their health.
			One off meeting		Scheduled for Feb/March 2026

Monitoring of Previous Recommendations/Actions								
Scrutiny items: (Follow up in 2022/23)	Strategic Director, Assistant Director, Lead Officer(s) & Portfolio Holder	Provisional meeting date(s) identified	Number of meetings item can be covered in?	Expectation/ Style of meeting	Scoping details (whether full scope or simple scope required)	Other details	Comment by lead Assistant Director/ Deputy	Complete ✓ ✕
Action Tracker. Page 29	N/A	To be advised - July 2025).	(i) <u>Covered in a single meeting</u> revisiting the previous review and seeing where we are today		N/A			✓

Any monitoring of previous reviews will be agreed when the Committee considers the action tracker at a meeting of the Committee on 3 July 2025

Pre-Scrutiny Policy Development	Strategic Director, Assistant Director, Lead Officer(s) & Portfolio Holder	Provisional meeting date(s) identified	Number of meetings item can be covered in?	Expectation/Style of meeting	Scoping details (whether full scope or simple scope)	Other details	Complete ✓ ✕

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