

# **BALANCING THE BUDGET (BTB) 2024/25 – Appendix D**

## **Overall Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) of BTB Savings Proposals**

### **Equality at Stevenage Borough Council**

1. Stevenage Borough Council is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion across its services, workforce and local community. To demonstrate its commitment to the identification and mitigation of discrimination and inequality, the Council will complete and publish Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA) when there is a new or revised policy, procedure, function, or where there is a withdrawal of service. For more information about the Council's commitment to advancing equalities please refer to the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy (2022-26).
2. We want to deliver services that are fair, accessible and open to everyone who needs them. Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) are an important part of the process in ensuring that our intention is translated into action. They help to ensure that decisions are made in a fair, transparent and accountable way, considering the needs and the rights of different people in the community.
3. Based on the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, the Equality Impact Assessment considers the impact on the following groups when making decisions, updating policies and starting new projects:
  - Age
  - Disability
  - Gender reassignment
  - Marital status
  - Pregnancy and maternity
  - Race
  - Religion or belief
  - Sex
  - Sexual orientation.
4. Although non-statutory, the Council has chosen to adopt the Socio-Economic Duty. Council's elected members and officers are required to consider the impact of their decisions on people who are less fortunate because of their social/economic background.
5. EqIAs also help the Council to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). The Duty states that a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
  - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is unlawful under this Act
  - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

## Balancing the Budget Proposals 2024/25

6. Prior to their consideration at Executive in December 2023, all savings proposals were reviewed to determine any potential impact on Stevenage residents in terms of their protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Some of these have no direct public impact and so have not been subject to any further EqIA.
7. Where a new change in policy, procedure, function, service or withdrawal of service is proposed, Assistant Directors and other appropriate managers have drafted EqIAs.
8. This year there are six new proposals that may potentially have a positive, negative or disproportionate impact. These are:
  1. Moving the Customer Service Centre (CSC) to the Atrium
  2. Digitisation of the Book of Remembrance
  3. Football Teams will no longer be provided with equipment such as goalposts
  4. New barrier system in Multi Storey Car Parks (MSCP)
  5. Increased fees and charges (General Fund) to include Planning, Indoor Market, Garages, Car Parks, Cemeteries, Parks
  6. Increased Rents and service charges (Housing Revenue Account)
9. The potential impact of these proposals is summarised over the following pages and will inform the recommendations made at Executive in January 2023. Action to further analyse or mitigate the impact on people with particular protected characteristics is identified where appropriate. Please note the
10. It should be noted that EqIA's are working documents and new equality impacts may be identified throughout the planning and implementation stages of the revised policy, procedure, function, service. To ensure that these changes are captured, EqIAs will be updated, and appropriate mitigations considered accordingly.
11. The following further activity will take place:
  - January 2024 - Consideration of this document at Executive meeting, alongside the budget proposals
  - Ongoing review and update of EQIA's and impact as proposals are further developed and implemented throughout 2024/25, including consultation and engagement as appropriate.

## Summary of Potential Impacts Identified as a Result of Budget Proposals Appendix D

### Key (Summary Potential Impacts Column)

1. Moving the Customer Service Centre (CSC) to the Atrium
2. Digitisation of the Book of Remembrance
3. Football Teams will no longer be provided with equipment such as goalposts
4. New barrier system in Multi Storey Car Parks (MSCP)
5. Increased fees and charges (General Fund) to include Planning, Indoor Market, Garages, Car Parks, Cemeteries, Parks
6. Rents and service charges (Housing Revenue Account)

Protected characteristic	Local/National Information	Summary potential impact(s)	Mitigating action(s)	Responsible officer
<b>Age</b>	<p>15.2% of Stevenage residents were over 65 at the time of the 2021 census, compared to significantly higher rates in Hertfordshire (17%) and England (18.3%).</p> <p>Stevenage hosts a slightly younger resident population</p>	<p>1. Since the pandemic the number of people visiting customer services 'in person' has fallen from on average 78 customers a day in Q1 2019 to 7 in Q1 2023, a 90% reduction in the daily average 'in person' visits. The existing space is now oversized for the number of visitors and customers coming into the centre. Another costly and confusing issue for the customer is that there are two entrances to Daneshill House. The relocation of the CSC to the Atrium will ensure that there is one accessible point of entry for service users. To accommodate this and ensure savings, the number of hours open has been reduced, from an</p>	<p>1. The relocation of CSC will ensure a more workable space to meet customers and expedite customer queries. The reduction in hours will be mitigated by improvements to the appointment booking system, which will allow service users to book appointments at times that are convenient to them. Under the Digital First approach, residents will be encouraged to book appointments online, but there will still be an option to call and drop-in where this is not possible.</p>	<p>1. Assistant Director – Transformation</p>

Protected characteristic	Local/National Information	Summary potential impact(s)	Mitigating action(s)	Responsible officer
	<p>than Hertfordshire and England, with residents aged 15 to 64 years making up 64.6% of Stevenage's population, compared to 63.9% and 63% in Hertfordshire and England, respectively.</p> <p>Office of National Statistic (ONS) data<sup>1</sup> confirms that under 30s and over 60s have lower than average incomes, with ages in between having higher than average incomes.</p>	<p>8am opening to a 9am opening. This may have an impact on all age ranges.</p> <p>2. The older generation of residents may be more likely impacted by the digitisation of the Remembrance book. People who do not have access to a computer or smart phone, may not be able to request or view their entry.</p> <p>3. Residents of all ages may be impacted by the Council reducing the amount of football supplies they provide to teams.</p> <p>5 &amp; 6. Older and younger people may be on lower/fixed incomes and therefore more vulnerable to socio-economic impacts. This raises the possibility that raising rents, fees and</p>	<p>2. The existing physical books will still be displayed, but all new entries (from go-live date) will be digital only. If the demand is evident, there is potential for a digital screen to be displayed to enable in-person visits and digital entries can be made with assistance from the CSC if needed.</p> <p>3. The Council will offer clubs the option to purchase nets and goalposts that the council own for a small fee. To encourage clubs to purchase their own equipment, Football pitch hire will also be available at a reduced rate.</p> <p>5 &amp; 6. See socio-economic impacts section below.</p>	<p>2. Assistant Director – Stevenage Direct Services</p> <p>3. Assistant Director – Stevenage Direct Services</p> <p>5&amp;6. See socio-economic impacts section below.</p>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/2023>

Protected characteristic	Local/National Information	Summary potential impact(s)	Mitigating action(s)	Responsible officer
		charges will have a disproportionate effect on them.		
<b>Disability</b>	<p>According to the 2021 Census, 17.2% of Stevenage residents had a disability covered under the Equality Act that limited their day-to-day activities, which is a 1.5% increase from the 2011 census.</p> <p>The Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that disabled workers earn on average £1.93 per hour less than non-disabled</p>	<p>1. The CSC relocating to the atrium may have an impact on people with disabilities through the opening hours changing from 8am to 9am.</p> <p>2. Residents who have a disability may be more likely impacted by the digitisation of the Remembrance book due to potential online accessibility requirements.</p>	<p>1. Alternative options will remain available for those who require support in person or over the phone. The addition of new ways to access services online is likely to have positive impacts for those with some types of disability. For example, this includes signposting residents to complete a general enquiry form instead of waiting in a phone queue for an average of 10 minutes. The use of sign language and in-person written communication is also on offer to support people from the deaf community visiting the CSC.</p> <p>2. The Council is compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) so that content is accessible to all. These guidelines have recently been updated and the Council will be reviewing all external and internal systems in 2024/25.</p>	<p>1. Assistant Director – Transformation</p> <p>2. Assistant Director – ICT</p>

Protected characteristic	Local/National Information	Summary potential impact(s)	Mitigating action(s)	Responsible officer
	<p>employees (a gap of over £3,500 per year based on a 35-hour week). The disability pay gap – the difference between median pay for disabled employees and non-disabled employees – was 13.8% in 2021.</p> <p>In July 2023, there were 4,252 Personal Independent Payment (PIP) claimants in Stevenage, 1,853 of which were male and 2,401 were female. This is 21% increase in claimants from March 2022 when there were 3,528</p>	<p>4. The new Barrier System in the Multi-Storey Car Park will use licence plate registration to calculate how long a car has been in the car park. User will be required to input their registration number when making payment.</p> <p>5 &amp; 6. The disability pay gap means that disabled people may be more vulnerable to socio-economic impacts and are more likely to be impacted by the increase in rents,</p>	<p>Whilst accessibility issues may arise for people with disabilities due to the digitisation of the remembrance book, those wanting to make an entry can request assistance via the CSC. Further, people who may have mobility disabilities can view their entry without having to make the journey to the cemetery.</p> <p>4. Guidance on using the system will be displayed within the car-park. Staff will also be available on site to advise. Disabled blue badge holders will continue to park free of charge and without time limit in any on-street pay and display parking bay in Stevenage Town Centre whilst displaying a valid disabled person's blue badge.</p> <p>5 &amp; 6. See socio-economic impacts section below.</p>	<p>2. Assistant Director – Stevenage Direct Services</p> <p>4. Assistant Director – Planning &amp; Regulation</p> <p>5&amp;6. See socio-economic impacts section below.</p>

Protected characteristic	Local/National Information	Summary potential impact(s)	Mitigating action(s)	Responsible officer
	total PIP claimants in Stevenage.	fees and charges. Refer to “Socio-economic” below.		
<b>Gender reassignment</b>	0.49% of residents have a different gender identity to the sex registered at birth, which is similar to averages of 0.41% in Hertfordshire and 0.44% in England.	No differential impacts directly related to people having this characteristic have been identified as a result of these proposals.		
<b>Marital status</b>	Less residents are in married, civil or partnership arrangements in 2021 (46.4%) compared with 2011 (49.4%).	No differential impacts directly related to people having this characteristic have been identified as a result of these proposals.		
<b>Pregnancy and maternity</b>	The total fertility rate (TFR) in Stevenage is 1.8 children per woman in 2021, which is an increase from 1.7	No differential impacts directly related to people having this characteristic have been identified as a result of these proposals.		

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	in 2020 and a higher rate than the TFR for England (1.62).			
<b>Race</b>	<p>The percentage of Stevenage residents who identify with an ethnic minority has increased from 16.9% in 2011 to 17.2% in the 2021 Census.</p> <p>In 2022, Office of National Statistics (ONS) figures showed that Black, African, Caribbean or Black British employees earned less (£13.53) median gross hourly pay than White employees (£14.35), which has been</p>	5&6. ONS data confirms the existence of an ethnicity pay gap in the UK. People from ethnic minorities may therefore be more vulnerable to socio-economic impacts such as the increase in off-streets parking charges. Refer to “Socio-economic” below.	5&6. See socio-economic impacts section below.	5&6. See socio-economic impacts section below.



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	consistent since 2012.			
<b>Religion or belief</b>	44.9% of Stevenage residents identify with no specified religion, which is significantly higher than Hertfordshire and England levels (36.6% and 33.7%).	No differential impacts directly related to people having this characteristic have been identified as a result of these proposals.		
<b>Sex</b>	The number of women who participate in any kind of sport or physical activity in England is slowly and steadily increasing in recent years. As of 2021, approximately 17.5 million women participate at least twice a month at any intensity or duration a slight decrease from	<p>3. The Council is keen to encourage women into sport and the need to purchase equipment may negatively impact women's uptake of the sport.</p> <p>5&amp;6. ONS data confirms the existence of a gender pay gap in the UK. Women may therefore be more vulnerable to socio-economic impacts and are more likely to be impacted by the increase in off-streets parking charges (see socio-economic section below).</p>	<p>3. The Council will offer the option to purchase nets and goal posts that the council own for a small fee. To encourage clubs to purchase their own equipment, Football pitch hire will also be available at a reduced rate.</p> <p>5&amp;6. See socio-economic impacts section below.</p>	<p>3. Assistant Director – Stevenage Direct Services</p> <p>5&amp;6. See socio-economic impacts section below.</p>

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	<p>17.78 million women in 2020 (<a href="http://www.statista.com">www.statista.com</a>).</p> <p>In 2021, the UK's gender pay gap rose from 14.9% to 15.4% (Office for National Statistics, ONS, 2021). This means that, on average, women earn just over 15% less than men per hour.</p>			
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	2.7% of residents identify with LGBTQ+ sexual orientations, which is higher than Hertfordshire's average of 2.3% but lower than the national average of 3.17% in England.	No differential impacts directly related to people having this characteristic have been identified as a result of these proposals.		
<b>Socio-economic</b>	According to the 2019 English Index	3. The Council reducing the amount of football equipment they provide to	3. The Council will offer the option to purchase nets and goal posts that the	3. AD -Stevenage Direct Services)

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	<p>of Multiple Deprivation, Stevenage continues to be the most deprived authority in Hertfordshire. Of this, Bedwell is the most deprived ward in Town.</p> <p>In 2023, there are 26.83% of garage licence holders that are Council Tenants that potentially are in receipt some sort of benefits payment.</p> <p>As of 2023, 41.95% of current garage licence holders are documented as being Age 60 or above and could be on lower incomes.</p>	<p>teams will result in teams and players having to provide their own, which may cause financial difficulties depending on their socio-economic status.</p> <p>5. Any introduction of parking charges is likely to impact most on those who are already at socio-economic disadvantage. This could mean that parking becomes unaffordable for some people. However, existing parking charges represent only a small cost compared to the overall expense of running a car, and the less well-off are more likely not to drive (more than half of households in the bottom income quartile do not have a car).</p> <p>The price increase on garages might impact residents with a socio-economic disadvantage who are in receipt of benefits. Specifically, some elderly, disabled &amp; socio-economic disadvantaged residents might be negatively affected due to being charged a maximum additional 95p per week for garages.</p>	<p>council own for a small fee. To encourage clubs to purchase their own equipment, Football pitch hire will also be available at a reduced rate.</p> <p>5. Stevenage Town Centre is well served by other modes of transport to offer alternatives for those who are already at socio-economic disadvantage. Future feedback on this will be closely monitored including throughout the upcoming formal parking public consultation.</p> <p>Holding a garage license is a discretionary service and licensees use them for parking their cars or for storage purposes. If the licensee becomes unable to afford the current tier of garages, they will be able to bid on a lower tier, lower cost garage through Digital Lettings.</p>	<p>5. Culture, Wellbeing &amp; Leisure Services Manager</p> <p>5. Assistant Director – Finance</p>

Protected characteristic	Local/National Information	Summary potential impact(s)	Mitigating action(s)	Responsible officer
	<p>In May 2023, 6,163 households were in receipt of Universal Credit in Stevenage, a 2% decrease from 6283 households in March 2022.</p> <p>In July 2023, there were 4,252 Personal Independent Payment (PIP) claimants in Stevenage, 1,853 of which were male and 2,401 were female. This is 21% increase in claimants from March 2022 when there were 3,528 total PIP claimants in Stevenage.</p>	<p>The increase in Direct Application Planning Fee might impact residents with a socio-economic disadvantage.</p> <p>There has been a slight increase on some charges associated with park and sports facilities (St Nicholas Pavilion; Ridlins Athletics; sporting events) that may have a negative impact. These price increases will be spread across a number all groups minimising the cost to individuals. These services are already subsidised by the council.</p> <p>Some plot holders may have to give up their allotment if they can no longer afford it due to their socio-economic status.</p> <p>Some fees for burial services have increased that may have a negative impact.</p>	<p>Fee increases and charges are reviewed annually by the Council to ensure that the cost of providing the service is met. Examples of where the council has discretion to increase fees and charges include (but are not limited to): Cemeteries; Fishing; Allotments; Env Health inspection; Planning; Bulky Waste.</p> <p>To help mitigate the increase in Planning Fees, the Council does offer a free enquiry service to ensure a person is provided the advice they need prior to making an application.</p> <p>For those that qualify, a funeral grant can be applied for to help with the cost of a burial.</p> <p>To help mitigate any negative impacts on residents the Council is able to offer concessions to those who are eligible. Eligibility is dependent on the service but typically will include residents in receipt of a means tested benefit. Please see the Council's</p>	

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	<p>In March 2023, the number of Council Tax Support recipients of working age (non-pensioners) was 3,154, which has slightly decreased from 3,366 in March 2022.</p> <p>The impact of the 2024/25 rent increase and service charges is 269 homes or 2.7% receive a rent and service charge increase less than £6 per week; 7,266 homes or 90% of households will receive a weekly rent and service charge increase of less than £10 per week (based on 52 weeks).</p>	<p>6. Rents will be increased by 7.6% from 1 April 2024. This has been calculated in accordance with the current Rent Standard issued by the Government that increases rents by September CPI inflation +1% and the Council's Rent and Service Charge Policy.</p> <p>Service charges are not subject to a 7.6% rent increase but are based on cost recovery or actual cost. So for 2024/25, service charge costs will increase with inflationary pressures and changes in usage.</p>	<p>Concessionary Policy for further information on the Council's approach to setting concessions.</p> <p>6. To help mitigate any negative impacts on residents the Council will continue to offer financial assistance through multiple support schemes and activities, including:</p> <p>Rent increase information will be published on the Council website early February 2024 to start preparing tenants.</p> <p>The rent notification letter (to be sent out at the end of February 2024) 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. Where a property has a number of service charges they will be fully explained, with a summary of how the weekly charge has increased overall.</p> <p>Where support charges are also included (mainly but not exclusively for sheltered and flexi care schemes)</p>	<p>6. Assistant Director - Finance</p>

Protected characteristic	Local/National Information	Summary potential impact(s)	Mitigating action(s)	Responsible officer
			<p>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> <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.</p> <p>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, Housing Benefit/ Universal Credit 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.</p> <p>For those moving into Affordable Rent (AR) properties a comprehensive affordability assessment is carried out</p>	

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			<p>prior to offer to ensure that the tenancy is sustainable.</p> <p>The implementation of the policy in respect of Affordable Rent will be kept under review by the Housing Development Executive Committee and should adverse impacts be identified this will inform future decision making in this regard.</p> <p>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 that they can pay through sustainable arrangements to maintain payments towards rent and service charges and have access to required support.</p> <p>Additional staffing resources have been secured to continue work to target and support Universal Credit cases to maximise income collection and minimise the level of arrears for this group of tenants.</p> <p>The Council will make links to support and guidance clear on all of its communication platforms.</p>	

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			<p>The Council will prepare staff to respond effectively and empathetically with tenants, this includes referral to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. Residents who are eligible to apply include those who have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• low income or claiming benefits (including Universal Credit)</li> <li>• have dependent children</li> <li>• ill or disabled</li> <li>• caring for someone</li> <li>• State Pension age</li> <li>• bereaved</li> <li>• pregnant or have recently had a baby</li> <li>• less than £16,000 in savings</li> <li>• savings are over £16,000, but this money was from a compensation payment or a Prisoner of War payment or you are on Pension Credit Guarantee.</li> </ul> <p>The scheme will be communicated to residents through customer-facing support services, as well as through existing information, advice and guidance provided by partners such as Citizens Advice. The Council will also publicise the scheme through its website and social media channels.</p>	



Protected characteristic	Local/National Information	Summary potential impact(s)	Mitigating action(s)	Responsible officer
<b>Other</b>		<p>5. Replacing cash payment with contactless payment will decrease the Council's annual costs. Also, this change will reduce crime in the area (no break-in attempts as P&amp;D machines will not hold cash).</p> <p>Contactless payments are more convenient than needing to have the correct coins for the required length of stay. This new payment method will appear on bank statements providing users ability to reclaim parking fee from their employer. Following this upgrade, these parking machines will be connected to a new back-office monitoring system enabling any faults to be quickly identified / resolved and allowing payment queries to be investigated.</p>	<p>Mitigating actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Free parking for disabled blue badge holders already implemented. Cash payment option retained in at least one Council town centre car park. Contact number for assistance to be displayed on all on-street parking machines to help those unable to pay via bank card or by phone. Future public consultation to determine if further adjustments are needed.</li> <li>- Discussion with the Garages &amp; Commercial team regarding garages void rates and inflationary pressures led to the implementation of applying different percentage increase to different garage types (ranging from 1.95% to 10%) depending on the specification and demand. Every effort will be made for residents to be moved to a lower cost garage (if available) if required.</li> <li>- Discussion with the Commercial Manager to undertake a benchmarking exercise of SBC pre-application fees against the fees which are charged by authorities across Hertfordshire. Council does also provide a free enquiry service for general householder proposals so will not have to pay for certain levels of advice.</li> <li>- Awareness raising of concessions available to those on means tested benefits. Raise awareness of concessions available to those on means tested benefits. Undertake satisfaction survey with allotment plot holders.</li> <li>- Notice will be given in plenty of time to market traders, with support provided to ensure they can continue managing their stalls (i.e., amended payment plans, downsizing if needed, etc).</li> </ul>	

## **Appendices – Linked EqlAs**

**[Add link to all referenced individual EqlAs and copy them across in the adjacent pages]**

1. CSC Relocation EqlA *(need updated copy following critical friend comments)*
2. Fees & Charges (General Fund) EqlAs *(need updated copies following critical friend comments)*
  - Parking
  - Garages
  - Planning
  - Allotments
  - SDS (Cemeteries, Parks & Trade Waste)
  - Indoor Market
3. Rents & Service Charges (HRA) *(need updated copies following critical friend comments)*