

Meeting **COUNCIL**
Portfolio Area **ALL**
Date **16 JULY 2025**



ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT FOR 2024-25

Author – Stephen Weaver, Scrutiny Officer (on behalf of the Scrutiny Members) Ext.No. 2332

Lead Officer – Richard Protheroe, Deputy Chief Executive

Contact Officer – Stephen Weaver Ext.No. 2332

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To report on the work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Select Committees during the 2024/25 Municipal Year and to outline the Work Programme for the three Committees for 2025/26.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the work undertaken by Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Select Committees during 2024/25 and the Work Programmes for 2025/26 be noted.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, Overview and Scrutiny's role is to operate as an independent function of the Council's decision-making process, by having overview of the Council's decision making, holding the Executive to account, having the power to "call in" decisions for reconsideration and undertake internal and external scrutiny reviews.
- 3.2 The Council's Constitution requires that there be an annual report to Council on the scrutiny activity over the past Municipal Year (see Article 6.3 of the Constitution).
- 3.3 This report is largely a retrospective look at the scrutiny review work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the two Select Committees during the 2024-25 Municipal Year.

- 3.4 In accordance with the Constitution the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was also charged with scrutinising the Cabinet's proposals on Budget & Policy Framework items that go before Council for decision. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has an interest in resources, including human resources, communications, contract compliance and financial risk. In addition, the Committees considered updates on Scrutiny studies that had been undertaken previously, examining the progress of recommendations and where appropriate following up on matters raised.
- 3.5 The Committees have also worked with their relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holders on a number of separate policy development meetings developing policies and considering reports before their submission to the Cabinet.

4 SUMMARY OF SELECT COMMITTEE REVIEWS

- 4.1 Each Select Committee review made formal recommendations to the relevant Executive Member, Officers and external partners. The following is a summary of the outcomes of each scrutiny review.

4.2 COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

The Community Select Committee held 9 meetings during the 2024-25 Municipal Year. These meetings focused on the following substantive items:

13 June 2024 – (i) Housing Allocations Communications Plan (ii) Resident Engagement Strategy (iii) CSC Work Programme for 2024-25.

9 September 2024 – (i) Update on the work of the Neighbourhood Wardens (ii) Consideration of the Committee's Action Tracker.

4 November 2024 – (i) Performance of the new Leisure Contract (ii) Urgent item requesting update on Damp and Mould.

28 November 2024 – (i) Damp and Mould Update (ii) Housing Asset Management (iii) Housing Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

8 January 2025 – (i) Scoping document for review of Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (ii) Officer Presentation into ED&I and external input with the Protected Characteristic Groups for Race and LGBTQ+

29 January 2025 – Equalities Diversity & Inclusion review external input with the Protected Characteristic Groups for Age and Disability.

5 February 2025 – Aids and Adaptations Policy Development.

26 March 2025 – Crime & Disorder Committee.

8 April 2025 - CSC Draft Work Programme items for 2025-26.

4.2.1 Scrutiny of Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion

Commencing this review, the Community Select Committee met on 2 occasions during the municipal year to undertake the review on 8 January and 29 January 2025 and were supported by the following officers AD Housing & Neighbourhoods, Kerry Clifford, Corporate Policy and Performance Officer, Daryl Jedowski, Corporate Policy and Research Officer, Charlotte Bott, as well as the following contributors from a selection of the protected characteristic groups:

- Errol John, Equalities Commission Legacy Group, and Kate Belinis, Stevenage World Forum representing the protected characteristic group for Race.
- John Prebble, from Junction 7 Creatives & Co-co Brinda representing LGBTQ+ community and the protected characteristic group for Sexuality.
- Youth Mayor, Lahaina Sutherland and Deputy Youth Mayor, Deputy Youth Mayor, Frankie Duncan representing the protected characteristic group for Age (young people).
- Lorna Scardifield, Age Concern, representing the protected characteristic group for Age (older people).
- Mind in Mid Herts CEO, Sharn Tomlinson representing the protected characteristic group for Disability.
- Alison MacDougall, a volunteer for Hertfordshire Vision Loss representing disability protected characteristic group for Disability.
- Paula McGuinness a visually impaired resident and Herts Vision Loss member, representing disability protected characteristic group for Disability.

4.2.2 The review is not yet complete, in 2025-26 Municipal Year Members will consider the link to the Council Cultural Strategy to see if there is any alignment between the ED&I – strategy and the cultural strategy and then a draft and final report with recommendations will be considered by the Committee.

4.2.3 **Resident Engagement Strategy**

4.2.4 Members undertook some pre-scrutiny policy development of the Council's Resident Engagement Strategy ahead of the revised strategy being considered by the Cabinet at its meeting in July 2024 - [CSC 13 June 2024](#) . Members raised some challenge around the following issues:

- How would SBC demonstrate they were complying with the new Housing Regulation Act 2023 standards with no extra funding? It was acknowledged it would be difficult for the Council to do this, but officers would be focusing on demonstrating reasonable adjustments and show that the decision-making process is fair and transparent.
- How would expectations be managed? Members were informed that the most effective way to manage expectations regarding housing was to make service standards, procedures and policies as accessible as possible and easy to understand, by training staff to deal with and verbalise the decision-making process. Officers who have the most contact with residents, such as the repairs team or the Customer Service Centre, would need to fully understand the new legislative standards as well as service standards.
- Recruitment of people to a customer scrutiny panel with specific skills would be needed. Rotation of the chair or recruitment of a strong chair to keep the panel on topic would be important to stop the loudest voices dominating the discussions.

- Members were keen for the Council to build on its co-operative neighbourhood's approach by using neighbourhood wardens to reach out to those residents who don't use online methods of communication.

4.2.5 **Neighbourhood Wardens**

4.2.6 Members received a presentation updating them on the work of the Neighbourhood Wardens, this was an update on a previous session that the Committee has undertaken looking at the work of the wardens [Community Select Committee - Monday 9 September 2024](#) Members commented on the following issues:

- The priorities for the service over the next twelve months and how the team measured effectiveness within neighbourhoods? The priority is to change community meetings to copy the policing priorities meetings structure and move to a priority-based model. Regarding community cohesion, Officers shared this was a challenge to measure but was produced through engagement with the public using soft skills, making sure that all interactions were not a tick box exercise. Members suggested that they would like to be involved in the work produced by the Wardens. Officers agreed it would be useful for Members to attend drop-in sessions, church events, fly-tipping sites, and engage with residents at the towers.
- Members recognised that the Neighbourhood Wardens were doing a great job in the community, including the way they were dealing with graffiti and the work at the skate park was considered exceptional. The Chair suggested there was still work to do to streamline communication with Members in an efficient way with less publication of the same information in different formats, such as at walkabouts, drop-ins, online community meetings etc.

4.2.7 **Performance of the new Leisure Contract**

4.2.8 Members received a presentation updating them on the performance of the new Leisure Contract. Members were invited to consider a one-off update on the performance of the new Leisure contract after a full year of the leisure provider Everyone Active running the Council's leisure facilities. This incorporated input from the Council Client-Side Manager, SBC Culture, Wellbeing and Leisure Services Manager and from the contractor, Everyone Active Regional Manager. [Community Select Committee - Monday 4 November 2024](#) Members commented on the following issues:

- Welcomed the impact that Everyone Active had made in their first year of operating the new Leisure Contract with improved equipment and service
- Identified a need for improved communications with the public re what activities are available
- A request for more detailed year-on-year participation data to monitor improvements and assess service impact. Everyone Active committed to provide year-end data to establish a baseline for future reporting

- Work to address Gym Anxiety. Members asked Everyone Active to consider women-only or introductory classes to make the gym more accessible to women interested in strength training
- The Affordability of Swimming Lessons to families with more than 2 children
- Health and Socio-Economic Barriers - linking the town's socio-economic factors to poor health outcomes, highlighting the importance of accessible exercise options, such as outdoor gyms
- The Chair voiced concerns about a lack of public knowledge about diabetes and pre-diabetes and appealed for Everyone Active to launch an initiative focussed on diabetes education and prevention to address the significant prevalence of diabetes in Stevenage
- The Chair congratulated the team for winning a “Best Health and Wellbeing Initiative” award. Special recognition was given to the Health & Sport Strategy Manager

4.2.9 Update on Damp and Mould

4.2.10 Members received a presentation updating them on the position of damp and mould in SBC tenants’ homes, [Community Select Committee - 28 November 2024](#) this was an update on previous reviews that the Committee had undertaken. Members were provided with an update on the performance of the current service, which included:

- A target of 20 days for all building work order requests had been established
- For November 2024 the work order KPI performance stood at 83.64%
- There were currently 114 active work orders related to D&M
- The average cost per job was approximately £1,735
- Any overdue work orders were primarily linked to roofing issues or instances where access had not been granted by the tenant
- That to ensure that the service remained fit for purpose a review of the policy would be undertaken alongside a stock condition survey programme and the adoption of a case management approach. Further developments included air quality monitors, use of technology and alternative wall finishes
- In relation to resources, Members were advised that a review of staffing resources had been completed in May 2024. The Disrepair and Damp and Mould teams had been combined and merged into a single team. Recruitment was in progress to make permanent appointments to new and agency filled roles and the procurement of support contractors was in progress

4.2.11 Members commented on the following issues regarding the service:

- In relation to water ingress or leaks, ensuring that these repairs were managed effectively was crucial, as inadequate drying could lead to D&M issues later on
- Complex cases would be dealt with by way of a case conference to consider the most appropriate way forward
- On-site surveyors were reporting cases immediately following the roll-out of technology. The 20-day target to rectify the issue would then commence

4.2.12 Housing Asset Management

4.2.13 Members received a presentation updating them on Housing Asset Management, [Community Select Committee - 28 November 2024](#) outlining the key areas covered by the Service, which included:

- All programmes of works had been developed using stock intelligence gathered in consultation with residents and housing management as this was key to understanding the condition of the stock
- Consultation would be undertaken on Decent Homes 2 and a detailed communications strategy would be drawn up to ensure transparency for tenants on where their property was within the programme
- Officers reported on the current position in respect of decarbonisation and energy efficiency with 2684 properties still requiring work to meet the minimum Band C target
- An update was given on the current capital programme including:
 - Major Refurbishment Contract (MRC),
 - Decent Homes,
 - SHDF Wave 2 – Delivery of Energy Efficiency Measures to flat blocks and Street Properties,
 - High Rise – Replacement Fire Doors (Flats and Communal); and
 - Fencing Programme – Planned programme of over £1million this year
- Improvements relating to the voids service were reported including the procurement of support contractors as the service moved to a hybrid delivery model
- The Aids and Adaptations Policy was in the process of being reworked and following a discussion at the Committee, it was agreed that it should be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee for more targeted scrutiny

4.2.14 Pre-Scrutiny of the Housing Anti-Social Behaviour Policy

4.2.15 As a piece of pre-scrutiny, policy development work, Members received a presentation on the Housing Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, [Community Select Committee - 28 November 2024](#) outlining the key areas of the policy, which Members commented on:

- It was recognised that anti-social behaviour was a priority issue for local people and that such behaviour could have a severe effect on the well-being of residents

- It was noted that the Council had a duty to take action to minimise it through preventative measures, enforcement actions, and support for victims, witnesses, and staff
- The revised Draft Policy set out the Council's approach to ASB including how the Council would work with victims, witnesses, partners and the Police
- Regarding the expectations of complainants, Members were advised that these had to be managed from an early stage as most cases took a substantial amount of time to reach a conclusion. Support would be available for all involved from the start of a case

4.2.11 Pre-scrutiny of the Aids and Adaptations Policy

4.2.8 The Committee received a presentation on the proposed changes to the Aids and Adaptations Policy. [Community Select Committee - 5 February 2025](#) outlining the key areas of the policy, which Members commented on:

- Members raised concerns about the reasons for refusal of adaptations and a perceived lack of transparency within the policy. They requested a detailed list of refusal criteria to be included
- Members were informed that decisions were decided on a case-by-case basis, allowing for individual assessments based on the tenant's needs and the suitability of the property
- Members discussed what the interpretation of 'reasonable' adaptations was, with Members seeking greater clarity on which types were more likely to be approved
- Members raised concerns that the policy did not fully consider tenants' disabilities when assessing under-occupation
- Members along with officers outlined the challenges faced within the Aids and Adaptations team, which included:
 - A backlog of cases due to resourcing issues, with recruitment efforts underway.
 - Budgetary pressures being managed through framework contracts.
 - IT systems under review to enhance efficiency.
 - Improved collaboration with HCC OTs and healthcare professionals to enhance service delivery.
 - Limited availability of suitable accommodation, downsizing incentives, and appropriate development properties to meet future needs.

4.2.10 Community Select Committee sitting as the Council Statutory Crime & Disorder Committee

4.2.11 At the Committee's Crime and Disorder focused meeting in March 2025, Members received a presentation on areas of interest that they had raised with the Police prior to the meeting regarding the following issues:

- What was the predominant crime in Stevenage?

- How confident were the police that people are comfortable in reporting crime?
- What actions had been taken/progress made by the police and the partnership, in terms of drug use in the town?
- Was anti-social behaviour still a problem for Stevenage? If so, were there hot spots, times of day, specific anti-social behaviours that are prevalent?
- Was cuckooing still a problem? What should vulnerable people do to protect themselves? What should they do if they fall victim to this? What do neighbours do if they notice strangers visiting a home in their street?
- How were the police connecting with our residents? Were the police attending resident meetings, councillor surgeries, community centres, schools, residential homes?
- Were the police being informed of safeguarding issues reported in schools - some statistics on this would be reassuring to know our young people are protected.
- Were the police satisfied with their ability to do preventative work on crime or do they feel the bulk of their work is reactive?
- How proactive were the police on uninsured drivers and untaxed cars? Some stats were requested.
- Was Stevenage going to see more PSCOs on the street?

4.2.12 Members were informed that during the past year the following incidents of crime were recorded for Stevenage:

- 7,233 crimes were recorded, representing an 8.7% increase from the previous year.
- Reductions were seen in specific crime categories including:
 - Shopping-related crime: 8% decrease
 - Residential burglary: 11.2% decrease
 - Vehicle crime: 36.9% decrease
- Violence Against the Person (including stalking and harassment) increased by 20%.
- Public Order Offences rose by 38.3%.
- Eight Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs) were issued.

Members asked further questions in relation to the following issues:

- the age profile of offenders
- the high levels of domestic abuse
- a question regarding accurate crime reporting. The Police encouraged the public to report incidents to facilitate data collection
- the Committee raised concerns about nuisance driving in Stevenage
- the nature of community engagements and the types of interactions involved
- Further discussion focused on drug possession and trafficking
- progress from the Build a Better Bedwell Project

- 4.2.13 For further details of the Police and Officer presentation and the Committee discussion follow the link to the meeting of the [Community Select Committee - Crime & Disorder Committee 26 March 2025](#)

4.3 **ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE**

- 4.3.1 Environment & Economy Select Committee: The Environment & Economy Select Committee held 8 meetings during the 2024-25 Municipal Year. [Environment & Economy Select Committee - SWB Website](#) These meetings focused on the following substantive items:

16 July 2024 – (i) Cabinet & External Partners response to Bus Scrutiny Review (ii) (iii) CSC Work Programme for 2024-25.

17 September 2024 – (i) Skills agenda interviews (Stevenage Works) (ii) Consideration of the Committee's Action Tracker.

8 October 2024 – (i) Skills Agenda interviews (Stevenage Children's Centre, Barnwell School, Youth Mayor) (ii) Update on Site Visit to North Herts College SITEC

12 November 2024 – (i) Climate Change Update

12 December 2024 – Input from Step-2-Skills re Skills Agenda review & draft Skills Agenda review report & recommendations

14 January 2025 – (i) Final Skills Agenda review report & recommendations (ii) E&E Select Committee Work Programme

27 February 2025 – Waste & Recycling.

11 March 2025 – Climate Change Update – Social Housing Decarbonisation.

4.3.2 **Skills Agenda**

The Committee met formally on 4 occasions in 2024 and informally with two site visits on 27 September and 18 October to undertake the review and received input from the following groups and people on the following dates:

- 16 July 2024 – draft scoping document and PowerPoint Presentation presented by Daryl Jedowski, SBC Corporate Policy and Performance Manager.
- 17 September 2024 – Interviews with Greta Gardiner, SBC Investment Project Support Manager who oversees the Stevenage Works programme, and Charlotte Blizzard-Welch, CEO of Stevenage Citizens Advice.
- 27 September 2024 – Site visit to North Herts College Science Innovation & Technology Centre (SITEC), with input from NH College CEO, Kit Davies, NH College Executive Director Corporate Services, Lizzie Jones and NH College Deputy Principal, Keith Turner.
- 8 October 2024 - Interviews with Theresa Kilworth, Barnardo's Children's Services), Jackie Johnson, Deputy Head at Barnwell Secondary School, Lahaina Sutherland, Stevenage Youth Mayor and Frankie Duncan, Stevenage Deputy Youth Mayor.

- 18 October 2024 - Site visit to Airbus, with input from Lucinda Williams, Jo Roberston, Head of Early Careers and Dave Ledger Senior Aerospace Engineer.
- 12 December 2024 – Interview with Matt Partridge, Deputy Chair of Step2Skills, the Hertfordshire County Council service that provides adult community learning and employment support service opportunities.

4.3.3 The review made recommendations on the following 10 areas:

- 4.3.4 **Recommendation 1 – (i) Expansion of Stevenage Works** - It is recommended that the Council be encouraged to expand Stevenage Works beyond construction into the health and social care sectors. **(ii) Expansion of Stevenage Works into “Green Construction” Solar and air source heat pump technology** - It is recommended that the Council be encouraged to expand Stevenage Works into a third iteration beyond health and social care sectors into Green Technologies.
- 4.3.5 **Recommendation 2 – Upskilling** - It is recommended that all partners including the DWP, Citizens Advice, Step2Skills, the Council and SMEs and larger employers should be encouraged to do this. Efforts from all partners would be needed to help lower skilled individuals obtain the skills they need to access higher skilled and higher paid roles which would directly tackle the problems associated with insecure employment from low-skilled, low-paid work, especially affecting a cohort of people aged in their late 20s to early 40s who still had decades left in the workforce.
- 4.3.6 **Recommendation 3 – Promotion of apprenticeships supporting nursery childcare into the local economy** - Apprenticeships in nursery childcare would both support parents in the local economy with the provision of more childcare and would support the apprentice to learn new skills and earn an income helping towards living costs whilst being trained. Members are aware that this is a national policy area which the Council can lobby on but has no direct control over.
- 4.3.7 **Recommendation 4 – Challenge to HCC & Local Children Centres regarding providing clear accessible information on what funding is available for families for childcare** – The funding position is currently confusing to parents so clarity would help in this area.
- 4.3.8 **Recommendation 5 – Promotion of work experience opportunities** - It is recommended that (i) the Council's Business Relationship Manager works with colleagues to promote opportunities for young people to connect with local employers for work experience; (ii) That SBC offers a range of work experience opportunities for young people across the organisation, and that these are offered consistently every year to local schools and colleges; and (iii) That SBC social media is used to share local job fares, open days, and work experience opportunities.
- 4.3.9 **Recommendation 6 – Promotion of success stories from Stevenage-** It is recommended that members and officers consider ways to promote success stories from the local community, celebrating successes by the college and schools where students show personal development or attain excellent skills outcomes, as they in turn become the role models for successive years of students, i.e. 'Mayors Award for Achievement'. This could be focused on those who have overcome challenges to achieve personal development, rather than focusing on the high academic achievers who traditionally already receive the recognition.
- 4.3.10 **Recommendation 7 – Promotion of a clear local careers advice service** (i) Work with partners towards a credible local careers advice service. Establishing a clear source of objective careers information which is available to pupils, students, and those wanting to re-train, or change direction. That a local link within the National Careers service is readily available, and that this reflects national standards in career

entry qualifications, but also what is available in Stevenage, and wider Hertfordshire; and (ii) Members proposed consideration of the creation of a centralised information hub on the council's website to provide accessible details about job opportunities, training, apprenticeships, and other resources. This platform would also allow businesses, schools, and colleges to contribute information.

4.3.11 Recommendation 8 – Commendation to North Herts College and Barnwell

School for their work in promoting skills - It is recommended that North Herts College and Barnwell School be commended for their work to promote skills to their students (Noting that for context the review only interviewed these two academic institutions, but Members are aware of other good practice towards enhancing skills that is happening in the area). North Herts College by providing Industry standard facilities and equipment the college are equipping young people with the skills they need to move straight into higher level courses, apprenticeships or employment and are responding to what employers have been saying for some time that young entrants don't have the necessary skills to be work ready. Barnwell School are offering an excellent peer to peer mentoring to ready pupils for university applications and interviews as well as collaboration with the University of Hertfordshire through their "zero gravity" and "Brilliant Club" initiatives.

4.3.12 Recommendation 9 – Devolved, local skills strategy - 'One size fits all' solutions towards skills are ineffective. Localised strategies are better suited to address skill shortages. (i) That SBC along with its partners in the broadest sense (Herts Growth Board, Job Centre Plus, North Herts College, Local Secondary Schools, Local Employers) continue to work to develop and genuine, local skills strategy, which reflect local skills opportunities and challenges within the local economy; (ii) partners consider the provision of targeted support to engage those in insecure roles, providing a second-chance for those already in work but looking to transition to more fulfilling and secure career opportunities.

4.3.13 Recommendation 10 – Collaboration with Employers to Promote Employment Opportunities - The Council continues to engage and build on the widest possible cohort for opportunities, continuing to engage with employers in the aerospace and pharmaceutical industries and recruiters in Stevenage, to ensure high-skilled job opportunities are widely advertised and accessible to local residents. Many high-paid, high-skilled jobs are not visible to job seekers, as they are often gatekept by recruiters. The review proposes working with companies and recruiters to address this because collaboration with local businesses was essential to bridge the gap and increase awareness of available opportunities.

4.3.14 For further details of the final report and background to the recommendations follow the link to the [E&E Select Committee - Final Skills Agenda Report - 14 January 2025](#) & Minutes of this meeting which provide further commentary on the review - [Minutes - Skills Agenda Review 14 January 2025](#) and the Cabinet Member and External Partner response to the review is detailed in the link - [Cabinet Member & External Partner Response to Skills Agenda Review - 11 June 2025](#)

4.3.15 Climate Emergency update

4.3.16 The Select Committee received an update in November 2024 and again in March 2025 from the Executive Member for Environment, Councillor Simon Speller and the Head of Climate Action, Fabian Oyarzun and the AD Planning and Regulation, Zayd Al-Jawd. In November the Committee received an updated document detailing the latest position against the original review recommendations and a Stevenage Territorial Emissions Infographic; Biodiversity Action Plan Summary; BAP Neighbourhood Breakdown and a summary of the Climate Change Community Fund Projects - [Environment &](#)

[Economy Select Committee - Climate Change Update 12 November 2024](#). In March 2025 the Committee commented on a further update focused on actions the Council was taking to retrofit and decarbonise its housing stock - [E&E Select Committee - Social Housing Retrofit Decarbonisation Programme - 11 March 2025](#)

- 4.3.17 In addition to the formal review work undertaken by Environment and Economy Select Committee Members, selected Members and Officers supported the work of the Executive Portfolio Holder for Climate Change by contributing to 4 informal meetings of the Portfolio Holder's Climate Change Progress Group.

4.3.18 Waste & Recycling Service

- 4.3.19 The Committee received a presentation from officers regarding the challenges and potential changes with regards to the Council's Waste & Recycling Services. [E&E Select Committee - Waste & Recycling Service Presentation - 27 February 2025](#) Members commented on the service with a view to bring back a service review in 2025-26. Members comments and challenges towards Waste and recycling are detailed in the Minutes of the meeting - [E&E Select Committee Minutes - Waste & Recycling Service - 27 February 2025](#)

4.3.20 Pre-scrutiny policy development of the Tree and Woodland Strategy and the Green Spaces Strategy

- 4.3.21 The Committee received a presentation from officers on the two updated strategy documents. [E&E Select Committee - Tree & Woodland Strategy and Green Spaces Strategy Presentations - 20 March 2025](#) The session facilitated a discussion about the management of woodlands and green spaces, with an emphasis on community engagement and collaboration with stakeholders to enhance and maintain these areas, underscoring the importance of involving the community in the planning and management of green spaces and highlighting the benefits of collaborative efforts in achieving sustainable and effective outcomes. Details of the Committee's discussion and comment can be found by following the link to the Committee's meeting minutes - [E&E Select Committee - Minutes of Tree & Woodland Strategy and Green Spaces Strategy - 20 March 2025](#)

4.4 OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 4.4.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 10 occasions to provide overview of the work of the Cabinet, specifically looking at all Key Decisions made by the Cabinet and all Budget and Policy Framework items. In addition to these meetings the Overview and Scrutiny Committee carried out its own work programme items:

4.4.2 ICT Update & Cyber Security

- 4.4.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as an agreed work programme item, received a presentation from the Assistant Director, Chief Technology Officer, Matt Canterford, updating scrutiny Members on ICT at the Council [O&S Committee - Officer Presentation on ICT - 10 October 2025](#). Following the presentation Members asked a series of questions with regards to; Councillors

questioned whether there were any efforts underway to assess our emissions related to IT usage, including hardware, software, storage, and cloud services. Additionally, what initiatives are being implemented to support SBC's goal of achieving net zero by 2030. It was stated that when moving systems into the cloud, it is challenging to record the true levels of carbon footprint. For further details of the presentation and minutes of the meeting follow the link to the [O&S Committee Minutes - Item 4 - Officer Presentation ICT - 10 October 2025](#)

4.4.4 Customer Service Centre Relocation

4.4.5 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as an agreed work programme item, received a presentation from Head of Customer and Digital Services, Greg Arends, updating scrutiny Members on how the relocation of the customer service centre had gone. [O&S Committee 20 November 2024 - Officer Presentation - Relocation of the Customer Service Centre](#) Members were informed that Customer service appointments now represented 10% of pre-pandemic levels, as online and remote processes had replaced in-person visits. However, housing-related services, lettings, and benefits remained significant reasons for face-to-face interactions. Around 30 unplanned visitors were seen daily, with common reasons including clarifications on council correspondence or non-council enquiries. For further details of the presentation and minutes of the meeting follow the link to the [O&S Committee Minutes 20 November 2024 - Customer Service Centre Relocation](#)

4.4.6 SBC Website

4.4.7 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as an agreed work programme item, received a presentation from Head of Customer and Digital Services, Greg Arends, updating scrutiny Members on use of the Council's Website. [O&S Committee - 17 December 2024 - Officer Presentation on the Council's Website](#) Members were informed that the website had undergone many advancements since it was first introduced over 30 years ago. The website had grown into a significant resource, now containing over 11 million words and more than 1,000 pages. Members provided a challenge to the accessibility and user friendliness of the current website and asked a series of questions and comments about possible future improvement of the website and these can be found by following the link to the minutes of the meeting [O&S Committee - Minutes of 17 December 2024 - SBC Website](#)

5.1 2025/2026 Scrutiny Work Programmes

5.1.1 The two Select Committees have agreed their Work Programmes for the year as follows:

5.2 Community Select Committee:

The Community Select Committee agreed to scrutinise the following issues:

- Progress of the new Housing Allocations Policy
- Tenant enforcement/ tenancy Audits
- One-off update item on Housing Damp & Mould regarding preparedness for the implications of Awaab's Law

- Continuation of the Equalities & Diversity scrutiny review
- Deep dive focus on Older People
- Community Centres - The Chair of the Committee to seek advice from the Strategic Director and Statutory Section 151 Officer and the Assistant Director Housing Development to discuss an update to the Committee on strategic plans
- Bring back an update on Sports & Leisure review and receive an update from Everyone Active & the Council's Health and Wellbeing Officer
- Statutory Crime & Disorder Committee
- Standing item on Public Health – with a view to work with HCC Public Health lead and partners including the Council's Health Scrutiny rep

5.3 Environment and Economy Select Committee:

The Environment & Economy Select Committee agreed to scrutinise the following issues:

- Main review - Refuse and Recycling with a focus on recycling in flat blocks
- Ongoing watching brief on the Climate Emergency – continue with 2 sessions during the year in Oct/Nov to coincide with the Annual Climate Change update to Council and in March to drill down on some specific measures
- Enforcement of fly-tipping
- Focus on Active Travel & Accessibility re Transport & the Public Realm
- Revisit review of Bus Services
- Update of the relocation of the Indoor Market
- Updates on the development of Green Space Strategies – Parks & Open Spaces (site visit to neighbouring offer at Stanborough Lakes in Welwyn)

The programmes above will be prioritised to ensure the key review activity takes place during the Municipal Year. As well as carrying out review work the Committee will also undertake any other pre-scrutiny Policy Development work as directed by the officer Strategic Leadership Team and the Council and Executive Forward Plan.

5.4 Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme:

5.4.1 In addition to undertaking all scrutiny of Budget & Policy Framework items and decisions of the Executive, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the capacity to undertake a "Select Committee" style meeting during the year if it so wishes. The Committee agreed to add the following items to its work programme:

- Corporate Complaints System – How do the new corporate systems link to Members enquiries and complaints?
- Pre-scrutiny Policy Development of the Council Tax Support Scheme linked to Universal Credit

5.4.2 Further one-off items are under consideration and will be looked at in more detail at the Overview & Scrutiny's meeting on 15 July 2025.

- 5.4.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will review the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions and also consider all 'Call-in' requests in accordance with the Council's Constitution. The Committee also considers any Councillors Call for Action in relation to matters relating to Resource. The Committee also considers any Petition appeals, in accordance with the Councils Petition Scheme, specifically regarding matters relating to Resources or of a Corporate or Council wide nature.

5.5 Scoping reviews

- 5.5.1 A schedule of generic dates for meetings for the two Select Committees has been arranged for the 2025-26 Municipal Year, as and when any further meetings are scheduled electronic diary invites will be sent to Members on the Committee. These meetings will incorporate the scoping of the review where Members will identify the areas they wish to cover during the review, who to interview, what evidence/background information is required and which Members will lead the questioning on a specific area, as well as undertaking site visits, where appropriate. Meetings will also be arranged to revisit previous reviews to monitor actions.

5.6 Pre-Scrutiny Policy Development Meetings

- 5.6.1 Pre-scrutiny Policy Development meetings will continue to be undertaken as and when directed by the Strategic Directors/Assistant Strategic Directors. These meetings are chaired by the relevant Overview & Scrutiny or Select Committee Chairs and the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holders are invited to attend.

4 **IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 **Financial Implications**

- 4.4.1 There are no financial implications for this report.

4.2 **Legal Implications**

- 4.2.1 There are no legal implications for this report.

4.3 **Climate Change Implications**

- 4.3.1 All Climate Change implications are addressed in paragraphs 4.3.15 to 4.3.17

5 **APPENDICES**

- 5.1 None

6. **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

- 6.1 Local Government Act 2000, Public Involvement in Heath Act 2007, Localism Act 2011, Overview & Scrutiny Statutory Guidance for Councils April 2024 - [Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities - GOV.UK](#)