

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 9 July 2025

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Richard Henry (Chair), Myla Arceno, Rob Broom, Coleen De Freitas, Jackie Hollywell, Loraine Rossati, Simon Speller and Nigel Williams

Start / End Time: Start Time: 2.00pm
End Time: 3.10pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tom Plater.

There were no declarations of interest.

At the juncture, Councillor Richard Henry, Leader of the Council reported on a visit he had made to the brilliant new underpass murals in the Old Town area which had been designed by local school pupils.

2 **MINUTES - CABINET 4 JUNE 2025**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 4 June 2025 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

3 **MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY AND SELECT COMMITTEES**

Cabinet received an update on the recent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which included the Green Spaces Strategy and Tree and Woodland Strategy, Panning Policy Update including Revised Local Development Scheme and Revised Statement of Community Involvement and two Part II items on Pioneering Young STEM Futures and Project Delivery and Principal Contractor for The Oval Development.

Members agreed with the view of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that it was important to recognise and reflect the relationship between the various strategies and plans the Council published.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny and Select Committee held on 10 June 2025 be noted.

4 **OUTTURN Q4 MONITORING REPORT FOR GENERAL FUND, HRA AND CAPITAL**

Cabinet received a report presenting the Council's current financial position across the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA), Capital Programme, and subsidiary companies.

The General Fund had a final position of £573,000 surplus over the working budget, and the HRA reported a surplus of £341,000.

In addition, the Council's General Fund allocated reserves have increased to £11 million. Despite the reported HRA surplus there still remains financial risk in particular to the HRA with increased costs of repairs so a full HRA Business Plan rewrite is underway to guide strategic financial decisions.

The report also provided financial information on the Council's companies. Queensway LLP was primarily purchased for regeneration purposes, funded by an external developer, with the Council leasing the asset. The LLP reported a £382K operational loss due to on-going commercial challenges and summarised some of the steps being taken. Marshgate Ltd the councils housing company posted a modest profit of £41K. The Council's joint venture with Mace at Swingate was progressing with construction on-site.

Cabinet was advised that a full HRA Business plan review was underway to guide strategic financial decisions.

Members were pleased to see that considerable progress had been made on the build of Claxton House, part of the Joint SG1 Development with Mace.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the 2024/25 actual General Fund net expenditure of £11.792 million be noted, subject to the 2024/25 audit of the Statement of Accounts.
2. That the 2024/25 actual core resources (government grants, business rates and council tax) of £12.994 million be noted, subject to the 2024/25 audit of the Statement of Accounts (paragraph 4.4).
3. That carry forward/spend requests totalling £262,070 be approved for the General Fund (paragraph 4.3).
4. That the Transfer to reserves of £1.450 million be approved for the General Fund (paragraph 4.7.1), subject to the 2024/25 audit of the Statement of Accounts.
5. That the transfer from General Fund reserves to allocated reserves in 2024/25 of £150,000 as detailed in paragraph 4.2.1 (III) and included in the overall additional transfer to reserves as set out in para. 2.1.4 be noted.
6. That the transfer from reserves in 2025/26 from the Transformation reserves (£9,390 para.4.6.8 refers), Town Square reserves (£104,560 para 4.6.1 refers) and transfer to the Elections reserves (£60,000 para 4.6.7 refers) in 2025/26 be approved.

7. That the changes to the 2025/26 as set out in the table in paragraph 4.6 be approved.

5 **HOUSING HEALTH AND SAFETY REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS**

Cabinet received a report outlining the Council's response to new legal and regulatory requirements addressing housing health and safety hazards, introduced under Awaab's Law. These requirements would be implemented in phases starting October 2025, with the initial focus on damp and mould, and all types of emergency hazards. The Portfolio Holder advised that there would be more phases coming forward in 2026/27 and that it was essential to ensure the Council's Housing Stock was as up to date and safe and warm as possible for tenants.

The portfolio Holder was pleased to report that the Council as a Landlord was in a strong position to manage the phases coming forward through the established Damp and Mould Team but that policies and procedures would be regularly reviewed.

It was noted that a full briefing would be shared with Members detailing to a number of further Government announcements in relation to social housing, such as more funding for Council homes, possible changes to Right to Buy as well as access to funding.

Members welcomed the recent Government announcements regarding more funding for Council homes alongside potential changes to the Right to Buy legislation.

Members thanked the officers involved in the organisation of the recent Decent Homes Programme Open Day which had been held at the Cromwell Hotel at which Members were given the opportunity to meet with contractors and companies involved in the Programme.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the new legal and regulatory requirements in relation to housing health and safety hazards as set out in the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 which are due to be implemented by way of secondary legislation with the initial phase to come into effect from 25 October 2025 be noted.
2. That the planned introduction of new electrical safety standards for the social housing sector in November 2025 be noted.
3. That the work being carried out to ensure compliance with the new requirements in relation to damp, mould and condensation and all types of emergency hazards be endorsed.
4. That it be noted that the Executive Housing Working Group (EHWG) will receive regular updates on compliance with the new housing health and safety legal requirements both prior to and following their introduction in October 2025. These updates will include implications of the planned widening of the scope of the new

legal requirements during 2026 and 2027 and actions required to ensure compliance once known.

5. That the amended Repairs and Maintenance Policy as attached at Appendix 1 be approved.
6. That the Strategic Director (Richard Protheroe) be delegated authority to agree any further minor changes to the Repairs and Maintenance Policy and/or Damp and Mould Policy after consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder.
7. That the potential resourcing implications for the proposed extension of the new legal and regulatory requirements to other Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) hazards in 2026 and 2027 be noted.

6 **Q4 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE 2024/25 AND ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25 AND CORPORATE PERFORMANCE SUITE 2025/26**

Cabinet received a report providing a comprehensive overview of the Council's performance at the end of the 2024/25 financial year and setting out the proposed direction for the year ahead. The report brought together key performance data, strategic reflections, and forward-looking priorities to support Cabinet in reviewing progress and shaping the next phase of delivery.

The Chief Executive gave a presentation on the Corporate Performance Suite and 2024/25 Annual Report.

Members were advised that the 2024/25 Corporate Performance Suite included 53 measures and over 100 milestones which were aligned to the 5 Making Stevenage Even Better priorities.

The one red target reported related to the residential garage void rate although there had been an improvement from Quarter 3. Economic factors had contributed to the void rate, with the cost of living being cited as one of the main reasons for terminations. Members were advised that Garage services would continue with a proactive marketing strategy including working with local housing associations and issuing surveys to license holders who live outside the town to better understand their needs. Further improvements to the online digital service including a new mapping feature was implemented in April 2025 which had stopped a lot of location queries.

The Chief Executive highlighted a number of key achievements in relation to the ongoing delivery of the Making Stevenage Even Better (MSEB) programme including Transforming our Town, providing More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Housing and Thriving Neighbourhoods priorities, Tackling Climate Change and Balancing the Budget and Equality & Diversity, Technology & Innovation and Health & Wellbeing.

While not reflected in a red performance measure, the Chief Executive advised that performance clinics were being used to look in more depth at the performance of

corporate compliance, the customer service centre and damp and mould.

The Chief Executive then set out a number of key Corporate and Business Unit Priorities for 2024/2025.

Members made the following comments:

- Officers were thanked for the Annual Report which was a clear read and included a large number of pictures which would ensure residents were kept informed of the Council's performance and plans;
- Officers should continue to identify potential windfall housing sites which could benefit local areas;
- The importance of Members using their Climate Change Community Fund should be stressed as there were a lot of schemes that could benefit from the funds;
- Regular monitoring was important and showed the Council's ambitions and improvements in relation to housing;
- There were many other exceptional services running in partnership in Stevenage such as the Equalities Commission and SADA.
- The regeneration programme in the Town showed the ambition and achievements of the Council and partners;
- The social value delivered as part of the new Leisure contract run by Everyone Active was welcomed;
- Thanks were given to the officers involved in recent community events in the Town including the Hertfordshire Dementia Festival held in Fairlands Valley Park and the Barrio Fiesta.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the service performance against 53 corporate performance measures and delivery of key milestones in Quarter Four 2024/25 through the Making Stevenage Even Better Programme (Appendix D) be noted.
2. That the challenges with Garage Voids and planned improvements be noted (section 4.2.5).
3. That the strategic risk updates (section 4.6) be noted.
4. That the draft Annual Report 2024/25 (Appendix A) be agreed, subject to any changes discussed at the Cabinet meeting and with final sign off delegated to the Chief Executive, after consultation with the Leader of the Council.
5. That the proposed Corporate Performance Suite 2025/26 (Appendix B) and MSEB Priorities 2025/26 (Appendix C) be agreed.

7

FLAT BLOCK RECYCLING IMPROVEMENTS

Cabinet received a report seeking authority to spend some of the allocated £1.078m funding for 2025/6 to deliver new and enhanced initiatives aimed at achieving higher

rates of recycling in Stevenage. This included the introduction of facilities at flat blocks that currently had no/limited on-site provision and/or required building works to enable level access for collection purposes. The introduction of a separate Food Waste Collection was also planned to be implemented by April 2026

Members noted that the report also proposed funding a Project Manager to oversee the implementation of these changes, working with residents to help make this a success.

The Portfolio Holder advised that this was a real opportunity for the Council to increase its recycling rates with the inclusion of 74 flat blocks in the town which currently had no recycling facilities. He thanked the officers for their work on this initiative.

Members welcomed the improvements, particularly highlighting the new 3 wheeled wheelie bins which had been developed by the Team which enabled easier recycling for residents living in flat blocks and suggested that the possibility of a patent for the design should be investigated.

In response to a request, officers agreed to look into the possibility of providing recycling facilities at events held in the Town.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the use of up to £719,000 from EPR funding to deliver recycling improvements to seventy-four flat blocks, to provide the necessary opportunities for residents to recycle plastics, glass, cardboard and food be approved.
2. That up to £199,000 from EPR funding to support the implementation of separate food waste collections to residents, should the funding received for this from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) need to be increased be approved.
3. That an allocation of £52,000 from the EPR funding to fund the SDS waste project manager costs in 25/26 and commits to a subsequent allocation to fund the salary (with any pay increase) in 26/27 (subject to funding), to deliver the legislative requirement for separate weekly food waste collections from residential premises from April 2026, and to support the delivery of the flat block recycling improvements be approved.

8 **HERTFORDSHIRE LOCAL RETROFIT STRATEGY**

Cabinet received a report introducing the Hertfordshire Local Retrofit Strategy, a county-wide framework developed collaboratively through the Local Area Retrofit Accelerator (LARA) initiative. It was noted that the strategy aimed to accelerate energy-efficient home retrofitting across Hertfordshire, supporting both social and private housing sectors.

Members noted that an accompanying action plan had been drafted and would be

refined through multi-agency collaboration to ensure a robust and deliverable model, including governance options. It also positioned the Council to benefit from coordinated, long-term retrofit efforts across the county.

Members welcomed the report which showed the Council's commitment to the wider green agenda as well as tackling fuel poverty and making a difference for tenants.

Members were pleased to note that £17.03million had been awarded to retrofit 825 Council homes and that there should be additional Government funding allocated for additional properties to be retrofitted. It was also noted that £1.5million had been secured to help retrofit a smaller number of private properties and Members looked forward to developing the scheme throughout the Town

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the adoption of the Hertfordshire Local Retrofit Strategy (the Strategy) be approved.
2. That the receipt of Warm Homes funding by the Council to date be noted and that its application in accordance with the conditions of the grant be approved.

9 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

There was no urgent Part I Business.

10 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. That the reasons for the following reports being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

11 **PART II MINUTES - CABINET - 4 JUNE 2025**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the Cabinet held on 4 June 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12 **WRITE OFFS OVER £10K**

The Executive considered a Part II report in respect of Write Offs over £10k.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations set out in the report be approved.

13 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR