

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 16 July 2025

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Nazmin Chowdhury (Mayor), Lloyd Briscoe (Deputy Mayor), Myla Arceno, Julie Ashley-Wren, Philip Bibby, Stephen Booth, Robert Boyle, Leanne Brady, Rob Broom, Jim Brown, Kamal Choudhury, Forhad Chowdhury, Peter Clark, Coleen De Freitas, Alistair Gordon, Lynda Guy, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Dermot Kehoe, Lin Martin-Haugh, Andy McGuinness, Sarah Mead, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Ceara Roopchand, Loraine Rossati, Simon Speller, Jeannette Thomas, Carolina Veres, Peter Wilkins, Nigel Williams, Jade Woods and Tom Wren

Start / End Time: Start Time: 7.00pm
End Time: 9.54pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Akin Elekolusi, Mason Humberstone, Ellie Plater, Tom Plater and Anne Wells.

2 **MINUTES - SPECIAL MEETING AND ANNUAL MEETING - 22 MAY 2025**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Annual Council Meeting and the Special Council Meeting held on 22 May 2025 be approved as correct records and signed by the Mayor.

3 **MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Mayor congratulated and welcomed Councillor Dermot Kehoe who had been elected in the Bedwell Ward at the recent By-Election. Councillor Richard Henry, Leader of the Council welcomed Dermot and congratulated him on his successful campaign. Councillor Stephen Booth, Leader of the Opposition also welcomed Dermot on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group. Councillor Kehoe thanked all who had helped in his campaign and the residents of Bedwell for voting for him. Councillor Kehoe advised that he looked forward to working with everyone in his new role.

The Mayor then referred to a number of events she had attended since May which included:

- Stevenage Day with its STEM and Life Sciences theme;
- Events as part of the Stevenage Festival including inclusive concerts, a

production of Shrek, a dance extravaganza and the Stevenage Singers Concert;

- Town Twinning Programme visit to Ingelheim;
- Hertfordshire School Games;
- Plaque unveiling at the Town Centre Gardens celebrating the work of the Green Space Volunteers.

4 **COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS**

Council received a presentation from Daryl Jedowski the Council's Corporate Policy and Performance Manager and Kit Davies, Principal and CEO of North Herts College (NHC) on the Stevenage Works Skills Agenda.

The presentation gave an overview of the Skills Agenda and included details of the timeline, what was coming up in 2025/26 and detailed a number of case studies.

In relation to the Framework, Council was advised that the key target cohort were young people, people with barriers to employment alongside people in employment. The key target sectors would include Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM), Creative and Cultural, Construction, Environment, Technology and Energy, Public Services and Retail and Hospitality. In addition, the Council had a well-established Stevenage Works programme, with the Council working with North Herts College and Job Centre Plus to provide Construction Skills and Health and Social Care training. Over 550 local people had benefitted from the Construction Skills training programme.

2025/26 would see a new NHC skills facility in place of the current Indoor Market site, launch of Phase 2 of Pioneering Young STEM Futures, SITEC Phase 2 and an expansion of Stevenage Works into the Health and Social Care Sector.

A number of comments and questions, were raised by Members including:

- STEAM – the involvement of the Arts was an important inclusion and many transferrable skills such as digital design would transfer across. Further work on the inclusion of Arts would be a focus. Although Arts courses were a focus for the Hitchin campus, the Stevenage Campus now included many areas such as the gaming suite;
- The Leader of the Council reiterated the Council's continued support to the Skills Agenda in its vision to raise the aspirations and attainments and providing opportunities for the young people in Stevenage;
- In response to a question regarding the relationship with the Job Centre and the Department for Work and Pensions, Members were advised that ideas were shared on a regular basis and that regional plans were underway involving various sectors including employability and back to work schemes for the construction and health areas;
- It was noted that although the funding landscape was complicated, the opportunity to draw in additional funding to support this work was a priority for the Council and the college;
- Members welcomed the case studies reported and were pleased to see both

the education and employment opportunities taken up by the young people referred to;

- In response to a question regarding parental involvement, it was agreed that the influence of role models was key for young people. Work was currently ongoing with the County Council and through community days and local school engagement to make sure there were opportunities for parents to get involved with the STEM Centre and Mission 44 work;
- The Council's ambition had grown throughout the process which had been shown by the expansion into a number of additional sectors.

The Mayor thanked Daryl and Kit for their presentation.

5 PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

There were no petitions or deputations.

6 QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL

There were no questions from the Youth Council.

7 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from the public.

8 LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Stephen Booth, asked the following question:

In view of the Council's declaration of a climate emergency, and the high temperatures experienced to date this summer, what plans does the Council have to mitigate the effects of extreme heat for tenants and residents through measures such as fitting ceiling fans to Council homes, and providing air-conditioned refuges?

The Portfolio Holder for the Environment advised that the Council had considered the impact, in particular in sheltered housing accommodation for elderly residents. Practical advice was offered but he advised that a full response would be given to Councillor Booth with all the support offered in this regard.

The Council then received updates from the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holders on the following matters:

- Underpass Artworks;
- Fairlands Valley Splash Play Park;
- Beryl Bikes Scheme;
- Pioneering Young STEM Futures;
- New Properties Allocated;
- 10 Year Housing Strategy;
- Improving Recycling Rates;

- Local Area Retrofit Accelerator;
- New Town Centre Letting;
- CCIN;
- Tenancy Involvement;
- Operation Educ8
- Mission 44.

9 **UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS**

Councillor Jim Brown, Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, advised that the Committee had met twice since the Annual Meeting in May and had considered the Cabinet decisions relating to Green Spaces and trees, tenant satisfaction and corporate performance, flat block recycling, retrofit for sustainability and the Council's Annual Report. A lot of work had gone into the Work Programme for the year including a pre-scrutiny review of the Council Tax Support Scheme, one-off reviews into the work force strategy and profile, contract compliance and ethical investments.

In the absence of the Chair of the Community Select Committee, Councillor Leanne Brady advised that the Committee had held one meeting on 3 July where the work programme for the upcoming year had been considered. Items for the year included the Housing Allocations Policy, Tenancy Audits and Enforcement, a Damp and Mould update, Equalities and Diversity, Older People, Community Centres, Crime and Disorder and monitoring the progress of the new Leisure Centre. She thanked Councillor Sarah Mead, the outgoing Chair, for her work over recent years on this Committee.

Councillor Leanne Brady, Chair of the Environment & Economy Select Committee advised that the Committee had received presentations on Trees, Woodland and Green Spaces, social housing and decarbonisation of social housing, and the Skills and Stevenage Works agenda. Upcoming work included waste, recycling and fly tipping, active transport as well as the annual report on the Climate Emergency. Councillor Brady thanked Councillor Broom as the previous Chair of the Committee for his work on the Committee.

10 **SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25**

Councillor Jim Brown Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, moved that the Annual Scrutiny Report for 2024/25 be noted.

In moving the report, Councillor Brown spoke of the difference Members could make to the Council in a non-cabinet role. He reminded Members of the robust challenge and difference Scrutiny Committees could make and that it was a function independent of the Council's decision making process. Scrutiny enabled Members to obtain a real understanding of issues as well as holding the Cabinet to account. A number of site visits and evidence gathering sessions, including calling a number of Portfolio Holders to give evidence, had also been held to assist with the work of the Scrutiny Committees. He advised that scrutiny, done well, contributed hugely to the well-being of communities

Councillor Brown gave thanks to the Members of the Committees alongside the outgoing Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Martin-Haugh for their robust work on pre-scrutiny and scrutiny and also gave thanks to the Scrutiny Officer for his support to all three committees.

Councillor Leanne Brady seconded the report.

The Leader, Councillor Richard Henry acknowledged the crucial work of the Scrutiny Committees supported by the Scrutiny Officer in holding the Cabinet to account across the ambitious work agenda of the Council. He thanked the outgoing and current Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees for their work.

It was **RESOLVED** that the work undertaken by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees during 2024/25, as set out in the report, be noted.

11 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Celebrating the Success of Stevenage Works in Delivering Social Value and Opportunity

Councillor Loraine Rossati moved the following motion: Celebrating the Success of Stevenage Works in Delivering Social Value and Opportunity:

This Council notes that:

- The creation of *Stevenage Works* in 2019 as a strategic partnership between Stevenage Borough Council, North Hertfordshire College, and Hertfordshire Job Centre Plus is delivering social value through inward investment, regeneration, and development projects across Stevenage.
- *Stevenage Works* has provided a single point of contact for employers and the community, streamlining access to jobs, apprenticeships, training, and work experience.
- Over 550 local people have attended training courses; more than 180 have achieved Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards; over 40 apprenticeships and 30+ employment outcomes have been delivered in the past year alone.
- Over £50,000 has been donated by *Stevenage Works* partners to support local community projects and good causes.
- The innovative use of Section 106 obligations to ensure developers and contractors contribute meaningfully to local employment and skills development is benefitting local people.

This Council further notes the Secretary of State's recently published priorities for Skills England (2025–26), dated 2 June, 2025, which emphasise the importance of understanding future skills needs, simplifying access to training, and co-creating solutions with local partners. *Stevenage Works* is already delivering on these national priorities by providing a single point of contact for employers and residents, aligning training with local labour market needs, and working in partnership with education providers and developers to deliver apprenticeships, work placements, and employment outcomes. As such, *Stevenage Works* stands as a model of how

local authorities can lead in delivering the Government's skills agenda and ensuring that inward investment translates into real opportunity for local people.

This Council believes that:

- *Stevenage Works* is a model of best practice in how local authorities can work with partners to ensure that regeneration and investment deliver real, lasting benefits for residents.
- This initiative has played a vital role in ensuring that Stevenage people are equipped with the skills and opportunities to thrive in a changing economy.
- The planned expansion into the health and social care sector demonstrates the adaptability and forward-thinking nature of the programme.

This Council resolves to:

1. Celebrate the success of *Stevenage Works* and commend all partners involved for their commitment to social value and community benefit.
2. Promote *Stevenage Works* as a model of excellence in local government-led economic development and skills partnerships.
3. Support the continued development and expansion of *Stevenage Works*, including the upcoming pilot in the health and social care sector.
4. Ask the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Education, the Rt Hon. Bridget Phillipson, to highlight *Stevenage Works* as an example of effective local delivery of social value and invite her to visit Stevenage to see how we are delivering the Government's skills agenda.

In moving the Motion, Councillor Rossati, Portfolio Holder Economy, Skills and Transport, advised that it did not only reflect the Council's achievements so far it also recognised what the Council was building in partnership for the future. She advised that *Stevenage Works* was a growing partnership created to ensure that regeneration and investment in the Town translated into real opportunity for local people and she reminded Council of the case studies heard earlier in the evening during the presentation. Councillor Rossati spoke of *Stevenage Works* not only delivering social value in theory but also in practice.

Councillor Rossati was pleased to report the expansion into the health and social care sector, recognising the growing demand for skilled workers and the chance to support residents into meaningful, rewarding careers. She spoke of the partnership with Mission 44 and Airbus and the relaunch of the Pioneering Young STEM Futures Programme which would contribute to long-term change, tackling inequality by closing gaps in skills and access to high value jobs.

Councillor Coleen De Freitas seconded the Motion as the Portfolio Holder for Equalities and Youth. She spoke of the importance of inspiring young people and supporting them into their future. She advised that *Stevenage Works* was a clear example of how regeneration could deliver meaningful social value, equipping local residents with the skills, training and opportunities they needed to thrive. The Council was helping to tackle the perceived barriers that prevented under served young people from pursuing careers in STEM and building clear pathways into the high quality, high tech jobs being created in the Town.

Councillor Booth, Leader of the Opposition, welcomed the initiative and asked about the arts and culture along with hospitality offer. Councillor Booth was also concerned that the communications on the Stevenage Works Programme had not been as robust as it should have been.

Councillor Bibby welcomed the initiative and congratulated the officers and all involved in the success of Stevenage Works but asked if there was any evidence to the effect on the employment figures in the Town.

Following further debate, Councillor Henry, Leader of the Council thanked Members for their support on the Motion. Councillor Rossati in responding to the debate gave assurances that the way forward was about new jobs, new ways of working, including working with AI. She advised that the communications of Stevenage Works would continue to be shared with the public to ensure local people knew how to access the skills and the training offer available.

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was carried.

Trialling highways changes to Lytton Way

Councillor Andy McGuinness moved the following motion:

‘This Council welcomes the exciting opportunities that the Stevenage Station Gateway offers by bringing the town closer together and ensuring more accessible travel between key business and shopping destinations across the Town.

Given the significant and permanent changes proposed to the layout of Lytton Way as part of the Station Gateway, this Council agrees to work constructively with the County Council, as the highways authority, to investigate the possibility of implementing a trial of a suitable timeframe, to mirror the proposed highways changes to Lytton Way in a non-permanent way, so that the impact of travel disruption can be fully analysed including any traffic displacement that takes place before a more permanent solution is implemented which will be difficult and expensive to reverse.’

In moving the Motion, Councillor McGuinness recognised the aspirations of the Stevenage Gateway Scheme as a core component of the regeneration of the Town which would open up the corridor between the Town Centre, the Train Station and the Leisure Park. He noted that the Council had undertaken multiple consultations with key stakeholders and the public with mixed outcomes. Councillor McGuinness expressed concern that the proposals for Lytton Way would exacerbate the busy traffic in the area by cutting off a key arterial route and have a significant impact in the Town. He advised that for the proposals to work, there would need to be a significant reduction in car usage to alleviate the impact. The offer from the County Council to carry out a temporary non-permanent trial of the proposed changes should be accepted so that the impact of travel disruption could be fully analysed.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Stephen Booth referred to the traffic challenges in earlier years on Lytton Way following the changes to the Swingate/Lytton Way

junction and stressed the importance of testing and analysing traffic flows at different times and fine tuning layouts before permanent changes to the road were made.

Councillor Phil Bibby advised that he also had concerns that consideration of traffic modelling was essential not only for Lytton Way but for the whole surrounding road network to alleviate any congestion caused by closing or partially closing Lytton Way.

During further debate, the following points were raised:

- The Area Action Plan had been in existence for a long time and had gone through, and would continue to go through, the process of consideration by the Planning and Development Committee prior to any decisions taken by the Cabinet;
- Modelling would take place prior to any decision made on the various options but it was likely to be ten years before the project could be delivered;
- The proper planning process for the scheme was very robust, would take into account the various impacts and the Planning Team would ensure that robust evaluation would be undertaken on any scheme such as this;
- The Leader of the Council advised that he had met with the new Leader of Herts County Council who had been very positive about the prospect of the station gateway project;
- In relation to transport planning, much work across the County and the Eastern Region Strategic Partnerships was still to be done and would require multi-agency involvement.

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was lost.

12 **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO CHAIRS/PORTFOLIO HOLDERS**

The Council received six questions from Members to Committee Chairs/Portfolio Holders. The responses to the six questions had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

(A) Question from Councillor Phil Bibby re: Major Refurbishment Contract

There was no supplementary question.

(B) Question from Councillor Peter Wilkins re: Beryl Bike Scheme

Supplementary question – Are there any plans to roll out the installation of docking stations beyond the Station and the Town Centre to other areas?

The Portfolio Holder advised that Officers would be working with the Beryl Bikes Team to look into further docking stations around the Town particularly in areas of greatest risk of vandalism or misuse of the bikes.

(C) Question from Councillor McGuinness regarding: Town Centre Regeneration and Local Government Reorganisation.

Supplementary question – could the Leader of the Council respond on areas of

the Regeneration plan such as the Civic Hub that may be affected by the much bigger proposed Unitary Authority?

The Leader of the Council advised that work was ongoing in relation to the Civic Hub and gave assurances that there would still be the need for a number of services in the Town Centre such as the Library, the Museum and Exhibition Space, Café, Toilets etc. He reminded Members that an All Member Briefing was shortly to be held where further information regarding the Local Government Reorganisation would be available for Members.

- (D) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth regarding: Biodiversity
Supplementary question – Is the Council consciously planting bee friendly plants?

The Portfolio Holder agreed with the need to do more to combat environmental damage and advised that there was opportunity for funding the planting of specific bee friendly plants in neighbourhoods through the Climate Change Community Fund (CCCF).

- (E) Question from Councillor Julie Ashley-Wren regarding: The Bus Interchange
There was no supplementary question.

- (F) Question from Councillor Tom Wren regarding: Transport links to the Roaring Meg

There was no supplementary question.

13 **AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 3 June 2025 were received.

CHAIR