

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 15 October 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, Coleen De Freitas, Akin Elekolusi, Alistair Gordon, Lynda Guy, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Mason Humberstone, Andy McGuinness, Sarah Mead, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Tom Plater, Ceara Roopchand, Loraine Rossati, Simon Speller, Jeannette Thomas, Carolina Veres, Peter Wilkins, Nigel Williams, Jade Woods and Tom Wren

Start / End Start Time: 7.00pm
Time: End Time: 10.05pm

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

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Sandra Barr, Peter Clark, Lin Martin-Haugh and Ellie Plater

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 16 JULY AND SPECIAL MEETING 24 JULY 2025**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Council Meeting on 16 July and the Special Council Meeting held on 24 July 2025 be approved as correct records and signed by the Mayor.

3 **MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Mayor spoke about the recent terrible events at the Manchester Synagogue resulting in two people losing their lives. She welcomed the developments over the past week including the ceasefire and asked Council to stand for a moment of reflection of those who had been affected by the terrorist incident in Manchester and the situation in the middle east.

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

- The signing of the Armed Forces Covenant in partnership with the Muster Point which reaffirmed the Council's promise to support the armed forces community both currently serving and also veterans and their families;

- National Sporting Champions event at Ridlings Athletic Track;
- Attending a dementia support group at Hampson Park;
- Herts Summer Parks Programme;
- Judging a schools recycling superhero competition;
- Fund raising event at Broom Barns School;
- Opening ceremony of the Knife Angel sculpture in Welwyn Garden City; and
- A book presentation at Stevenage Library.

Members made the following comments:

- As part of the wider Knife Angel programme, the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire were holding an art competition for young people under 25 and were encouraging schools and youth organisations ;
- The coffee morning at Broom Barns school had raised more than £900 for Macmillan;
- Members thanked the Mayor for the opportunity to remember the victims of the recent incident in Manchester.

4 **COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS**

There were no community presentations.

5 **PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS**

There were no petitions or deputations.

6 **QUESTIONS FROM THE YOUTH COUNCIL**

The Council received a question from the Youth Council regarding the proposed reduction in the voting age. The response to the question had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

There was no supplementary question.

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:

Now that the County Council had started work on the Old Town High Street, businesses and their customers would be experiencing disruption and inconvenience with the loss of free parking well into 2026. Would the Leader of the Council consider offering free parking for the first half an hour in both the Primett Road and Church Lane car parks whilst the road works continued?

The Leader of the Council asked the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Skills and Transport to respond to Councillor Booth's question.

The Portfolio Holder advised that there were ongoing discussions with Herts County Council regarding possible contributions from them for the loss of income to ensure local taxpayers were not disadvantaged. The suggestion of thirty minutes free parking would impact the Council's income and impact other spend priorities across the town such as leisure. The Portfolio Holder suggested that the Leader of the Opposition speak to his Liberal Democrat County Council colleagues to request support on the issue.

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

- Climate Change Community Fund;
- The New Leisure Centre and Carbon Footprint;
- Expansion of the Beryl Bike Scheme;
- STEM Opportunities in Stevenage;
- Tenancy Audits;
- Housing Development and Grant Funding;
- International Day of Older People;
- Co-operative Neighbourhoods Update;
- 16 Days of Action – Domestic Abuse;
- Flags;
- Bus Interchange Sculpture;
- 80th Anniversary of Stevenage;
- LGR Update.

9 UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS

Councillor Jim Brown, Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, provided updates for Council from the meetings held on 23 September and 14 October:

The September Meeting had reviewed Cabinet decisions from 17 September, including:

- Finance reports (Medium Term Financial Strategy, Revenue & Capital Monitoring, Treasury Management)
- Corporate Performance Q1
- Taxi Rank Revocation (Danestrete)
- Grenfell Inquiry Phase 2
- Social Housing Warm Homes Contract (Part II)

Key discussions at the meeting included the Fair Funding Review and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), concerns about funding distribution and impact on Stevenage and Taxi Rank safety issues due to construction development.

The October Meeting had reviewed Cabinet decisions on:

- Fees and charges (2026/27) for General Fund, HRA, retail seating, planning, and taxi tariffs
- Climate Change Strategy Annual Update
- Rent setting and service charge policy (2025–2027)

Restricted items considered included Commercial opportunities, sports & leisure centre, regeneration, wholly owned companies, land & development and there was an upcoming discussion on LGR at the November meeting.

In the absence of the Chair of the Community Select Committee, Councillor Leanne Brady advised that the Committee had met in September and had received an update on Damp and Mould in Stevenage Council Housing and also on Tenant Enforcement and Tenancy Audits.

In relation to Damp and Mould case statistics, Members had been informed that from April to July 2025 97% of all cases raised had been completed, with 89% of these completed within the 10 working days.

Members were also brought up to date on the preparations that the Council was making to be compliant with Awaab's Law which comes into force in October 2025.

Councillor Leanne Brady, Chair of the Environment & Economy Select Committee then gave an update on the work of that Committee. She advised that a presentation had been received from Stevenage Direct Services Officers regarding the challenges of providing recycling in the Council's low rise flat blocks. Challenges included limited space available for bin storage in older blocks, the difficulties posed by stair access, and the impact of poor signage and contamination on recycling levels.

Members welcomed the use of an SBC designed three wheeled bin for use by staff and a number of possible recommendations for the review were identified:

- Promotion of recycling champions and work with young residents, including consideration of smiley stickers use on bins
- Consider using large colour wraps on the bin lids to differentiate different recycling bins
- At Bring Bank sites consider using mobile CCTV and where fly tipping can be evidenced follow up with education and civil prosecution
- Regarding any future plans to rationalise the Bring Bank Sites, Members would like to see any plans ahead of any public consultation

Members had interviewed the Cabinet Portfolio with responsibility for Environment, Cllr Rob Broom who responded to a number of areas including:

- the Portfolio Holders' priorities for the future of the service;
- target setting for Stevenage regarding improved recycling and time period;
- barriers to effective recycling;
- measuring success;
- challenges and opportunities to the service through LGR.

Finally, the Committee received some feedback from a Member site visit to the

Cavendish Road recycling depot and from Members who attended with the Stevenage Direct Services refuse and recycling operatives on their collection route. Members were very impressed with the efficiency of the service.

10

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Establishing a Lasting and Sustainable Commitment to Age Friendly Communities and Dementia-Friendly Action in Stevenage

Councillor Myla Arceno moved the following motion:

This Council recognises the rising prevalence of dementia in Stevenage and Hertfordshire, and the profound impact on people, families, and the wider community. We affirm the need for an inclusive borough where people with dementia are understood, respected, and supported to live well. Around 1,100 residents aged 65+ in Stevenage live with dementia—higher than many other Hertfordshire districts*.

Older adults in Stevenage face above-average emergency admissions for falls and frailty, straining health and care services. Women's life expectancy is below the national average, and the gap between the most and least deprived men is 4.8 years. Nearly 40% of older adults with severe frailty, dementia, or end-of-life needs live in the town's most deprived areas, highlighting the link between deprivation and poor health.

Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) is committed to the following services and initiatives:

- **Community Support Service:** For council tenants aged 55+, offering regular contact, emergency help, and support accessing care and social activities. Independent living schemes and “Extra Care” housing provide safe, supported environments.
- **Housing for Older People Strategy (2020–2030):** Joint work with HCC to ensure suitable housing options for ageing residents.
- **Care Connect:** A 24/7 personal alarm and response service run by SBC.
- **Dementia-Friendly Status:** Achieved in 2023, with ongoing review by the Alzheimer's Society and partnership work through Healthy Stevenage and the Dementia Sub-Group. SBC co-produced a booklet of dementia-friendly activities.
- **Age-Friendly Recognition:** Stevenage is nationally recognised as an Age-Friendly Community, with health, leisure, and social opportunities delivered in partnership to reduce isolation and promote active ageing.

Council Resolves:

To build on this foundation and maintain Stevenage's Age-Friendly and Dementia-Friendly status, the Council commits to:

1. **Dementia Training:** dementia awareness training to be added to mandatory training for all SBC staff and elected members to support inclusive service delivery.
2. **Annual Awareness Event:** Host a public Dementia-Friendly Stevenage and International Day for Older People event with partners and carers, aligned with Age-

Friendly work to promote awareness and celebrate progress.

3. Ongoing Accreditation: Work with the Alzheimer's Society and stakeholders to ensure council and partner premises pursue dementia-friendly accreditation.

Maintain registration with the Centre for Better Aging.

4. Inclusive Design: Ensure all council-led developments incorporate dementia- and age-friendly design principles—clear signage, accessible layouts, appropriate lighting, and calm public spaces.

5. Transport and Business Engagement: Require all licensed taxi and private hire drivers to complete dementia awareness training. Encourage local businesses to gain Age and Dementia-Friendly accreditation.

6. Action Plan: Co-produce a Stevenage Age-Friendly and Dementia-Friendly Action Plan with businesses and community stakeholders, setting clear goals and measures of success.

7. Continue Key Services: Maintain the Housing Strategy, Community Support Service, health and wellbeing initiatives, and Care Connect 24/7.

With this motion, the Council reaffirms its commitment to compassion, inclusivity, and foresight—ensuring Stevenage remains a borough where older people and those with dementia are supported, empowered, and welcomed.

* Source: HCC Public Health, 2024

In moving the motion, Councillor Arceno advised it was a lasting and sustainable commitment to age friendly communities and dementia friendly action in Stevenage. She advised that the Council was committed to many services and initiatives such as community support services for Council tenants aged 55 and above. She also advised that in the light of the proposed Local Government Reorganisation, it was essential to have a concrete commitment in Stevenage to older residents in the town, those with dementia and their carers and families. Councillor Arceno reiterated the Council's commitment to continue to support the International Day of Older People and the Dementia Friendly events that were held in support of older residents. She also stressed the importance of awareness raising through training for all including Council staff and elected members.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Sarah Mead advised that the reality of an age friendly community would make a huge difference and acknowledged that a large group of residents were unable to access online services and it was essential that appropriate support was available to them and their carers and families.

Councillor Booth, Leader of the Opposition congratulated Councillor Arceno for bringing the motion to Council's attention. He expressed concern regarding the financial impact on the Council of the Motion and asked if an assessment had been made on the cost of delivering the programme.

Councillor Bibby praised the motion but referred to the ever increasing demand and lack of funding with dementia not being given the highest priority by the Government. He suggested that the Secretary of State for Health be lobbied by the Council for a comprehensive review of the service.

The Leader of the Council advised that the Council would look at the required funding on a scheme by scheme basis and that the Government's Fair Funding

Review should assist the Council in being more flexible in funding these sort of campaigns.

Following further debate, Councillor Arceno, thanked Members for their support on the Motion.

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

Our national flags – a source of pride and unity in Stevenage

Councillor Andy McGuinness moved the following motion:

This Council believes that the heart of the Town does lie in its people, no matter what their background, and acknowledges and celebrates its founding motto, reflecting a vibrant and diverse community. The Council further believes that our national flags are a source of pride and unity and should not be used to seek to sow disharmony and disunity. Therefore, this Council resolves to:

1. Seek to work collaboratively with the County Council to respectively take down and store all national flags that are being displayed illegally on local authority land or assets.
2. Work with local arts and community organisations to use these flags, where possible, to create artworks, flag displays and murals in appropriate places which celebrate our national flags, the cultural diversity and history of our town, and our long and deep national pride.

In moving the Motion, Councillor McGuinness recognised and appreciated the strong feelings that the issue of the raising of the flags evoked. However he was of the view that the sense of national pride was being manipulated by others for inappropriate ends. He advised that the issue should not be political as the flag belonged to the British people. In his opinion, the flying of the flags had not been done as a sense of pride or community cohesion but borne out of misplaced nationalism and on division not on unity. He was proud of the long history of migration into Britain welcoming those that had been oppressed. He was pleased that the County Council had agreed that they would take down the flags when resources were available and encouraged Stevenage Borough Council to do the same given current concerns voiced by the community.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Stephen Booth expressed concern that the flags should be removed before they caused accidents potentially landing on car windscreens while people were driving. He advised that the flags should be flown as symbols of pride, unity and togetherness and not to intimidate and alarm minorities.

During further debate, the following points were raised:

- Members echoed the sentiment in the first paragraph of the motion that pride was shared in the vibrant and diverse community in the Town;
- The flag represented unity not division and the Council had a clear policy on the display of the national flags which were already flown proudly at civic

buildings safely and appropriately however, flags not seen to be causing any danger to the public would be left;

- In response to a comment made by Councillor Booth regarding a quote by the Prime Minister about colours of faces in Birmingham, it was confirmed by Councillor Booth that this should be attributed to Robert Jenrich MP and not the Prime Minister as originally stated;
- The vast majority of flags were on highways land and property so the motion could be directed to the Liberal Democrat administration at the County Council to address;
- Stevenage Borough Council already worked co-operatively with a number of organisations including the County Council on many issues;
- Caution was required regarding mandating what the creative community in Stevenage should produce in relation to their art installations;
- The flags were being raised by far-right groups to sew division within the community and the motion would allow for a strong message to be sent that the Council would not stand for these campaigns;
- It was disappointing that Members at the meeting appeared uncomfortable with the patriotic display which had been put up proudly by members of the public;
- Currently the flags had different meaning for different people with some feeling uncomfortable and threatened and support should be considered for those affected.

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

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

The Council received five questions from Members to Committee Chairs/Portfolio Holders.

The Mayor reminded Members that Standing Orders allowed for one question with a supplementary question only. She advised that she had used her discretion this time to allow for a question with multiple parts but would not allow this at future meetings.

The responses to the five questions had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

(A) Question from Councillor Peter Wilkins re: Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO's)

Supplementary question – Will the Council do all it can to stop the indiscriminate use of HMO's to house asylum seekers when the hotels are closed as this is not an appropriate form of housing in terms of monitoring or support for asylum seekers and would be unpopular with local residents?

The Portfolio Holder advised that the future use of HMO's in Stevenage was currently not known and Councillor Wilkins had been provided with the information relating to the practical planning policies in place to restrict the use

of HMO's in terms of ASB, parking and noise. The Portfolio Holder agreed to provide a more detailed answer outlining the Home Office's policy on rehousing people in an asylum situation into communities when he could.

- (B) Question from Councillor Phil Bibby re: Sports and Leisure Centre
Supplementary question – Is the Portfolio Holder disappointed that the new leisure centre does not accommodate as many sports as the current one does and does not include emerging sports such as pickle ball and padel tennis.

The Portfolio Holder advised that it had been fifty years since the original arts and leisure centre had been built separate from the original swimming pool and a new facility was needed and that this would be a much improved offer for more people in the Town. He would be happy to meet with anyone particularly dissatisfied with the range of activities in the new leisure centre and had already arranged meetings with a number of interested parties.

- (C) Question from Councillor Robin Parker regarding: Garage Forecourt Maintenance.

Supplementary question – can buying a small sweeper be considered to ensure all parts of the garage forecourts could be cleaned.

The Portfolio Holder advised that she would ask officers to look at the possibility and price of the suggestion from Councillor Parker.

- (D) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth regarding: IT

Supplementary question – Could Members be given the opportunity to provide some input into the current software used at the Council

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that the software used was used across the Globe and it appeared that most Members managed to use it with no real issues. Additional training was available if Members felt this was needed.

- (E) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness regarding: the cleaning of shopping areas around the Town

Supplementary question – Could there be some consideration that due care and attention be given to our much loved and much used local shopping centres.

The Portfolio Holder for the Environment advised that the Stevenage Direct Services (SDS) staff did a good job with the resources they had. The issue was allocating resources effectively to try and keep the neighbourhood areas as tidy and presentable as possible. Local residents and local businesses were also key in maintaining and monitoring the areas and must ensure issues were reported to the Council for SDS to respond in a timely fashion.

GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Councillor Richard Henry moved a report in accordance with section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, to approve Councillor Sandra Barr's non-attendance at meetings of the Council for a further period of 6 months until 15 April 2026, on the grounds of ill health.

In seconding the report, Councillor Claire Parris advised that Councillor Barr was an integral part of the Council and her support for the residents of St Nicholas was well documented. She spoke of Cllr Barr's recovery and that her regular meetings with her related to Council and St Nicholas ward business. She also gave reassurances that the St Nicholas Ward and its residents were being fully supported by both Councillor Henry and herself.

Councillors on the whole were supportive of the recommendations but a concern was expressed by a member that although his best wishes for a speedy recovery were sent to Councillor Barr, in his opinion, in the interests of responsibility and representation she should step aside for an alternative representative to be elected.

A number of members spoke in support of the extension to Councillor Barr's non-attendance and referred to her passion and enthusiasm and her contribution to the Council and on behalf of the residents in the Town.

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that, in accordance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972, Councillor Barr's non-attendance at meetings for a further six months, until 15 April 2026 be approved, on the grounds of ill health, and that the Council's best wishes be conveyed to her.

13 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2024/25 AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS

The Council considered a report in respect of the Annual Treasury Management Review 2024/25, including the Prudential Code. It was noted that the report had been endorsed by both the Audit Committee and the Cabinet.

It was moved by Councillor Jeannette Thomas, and seconded by Councillor Carolina Veres, that the Recommendations in the report be approved.

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that the 2024/25 Annual Treasury Management Review be approved.

14 AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

15 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That, under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 to 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.

2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

16 **SPORTS AND LEISURE CENTRE**

The Council considered a Part II report in respect of progress towards delivering the Council's new Stevenage Sports and Leisure Centre

In moving the report, the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure and Wellbeing advised that the new Leisure Centre would be a tremendous asset to the Town and would enable more people to live active healthy lifestyles.

In seconding the report, the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Skills and Transport advised that the development was a significant step forward for the Town and the vast majority of the Town's population.

Following further debate where all Members welcomed the new Leisure Centre, upon being put to the vote it was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the funding to deliver the Sports and Leisure Centre, as set out in the report and included in both the Capital and Treasury Management Strategy be approved.
2. That the funding be included in the Capital Strategy to fund the Sports and Leisure Centre

CHAIR