

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday, 19 November 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Jim Brown (Chair), Andy McGuinness (Vice-Chair), Phil Bibby, Kamal Choudhury, Peter Clark, Alistair Gordon, Lynda Guy, Ellie Plater and Ceara Roopchand

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.15pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sandra Barr, Stephen Booth, Robert Boyle and Leanne Brady.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Part I Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 14 October 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET 12 NOVEMBER 2025 - SECOND QUARTER MONITORING REPORT FOR GENERAL FUND, HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT AND CAPITAL MONITORING

The Assistant Director of Finance and Deputy S151 Officer provided an update to the Committee on the Quarter 2 2025/26 monitoring for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Capital Monitoring. It was noted that the General Fund showed a stable and balanced position, with a minor overspend of £1,380.

Members were informed that the Council remained within its delegated budget variation limit, with reserves and balances forecasted to remain above the minimum threshold.

It was noted that in relation to capital, £10 million of expenditure had been rephased into future years. The HRA was projected to have an underspend of £164,000, although there continued to be demands with repairs and maintenance costs.

A question was raised regarding the salary budget overspend and the increase of agency staff within Stevenage Direct Services (SDS). Officers advised that the reliance on agency workers was being reviewed, noting that despite a previous restructure, agency staff were still required to cover some refuse rounds, weekend work, sickness and leave.

It was confirmed that this issue had been raised with the Assistant Director of SDS to determine the service's staffing requirements. Officers also highlighted the recent unpredictability of pay awards, which had affected the ability to offset agency costs with salary underspends.

A further question was raised regarding the accuracy of the General Fund working budget figures in a table referenced at 4.3.2 in the report, which appeared identical to the original budget. Officers confirmed that the approved budget changes and second quarter review adjustments had been incorrectly shown within the original budget column. Officers agreed to circulate an amended table to the Committee.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

4 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET 12 NOVEMBER 2025 - MID YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2025/26 AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS**

The Assistant Director of Finance and Deputy S151 Officer advised the Committee that Cabinet had received the Mid-Year Treasury Management review, which confirmed compliance with all Prudential and Treasury indicators, and no breaches of borrowing or investment limits.

Members were advised that market conditions, including inflation and interest rate movements, would continue to be closely monitored to ensure financial sustainability.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

5 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET 12 NOVEMBER 2025 - COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2026/27**

The Strategic Director and CFO advised the Committee that the Council Tax Support Scheme would be maintained in its current form for 2026/27 due to the fact that it had not been possible to carry out any modelling that did not show a significant impact on those in receipt of the current support scheme.

It was noted that future schemes would depend on the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) timeline, as a single scheme would be required for the new unitary authority. With each legacy authority likely to have a different level of Council Tax Support, work would therefore continue, allowing the Council to implement changes or defer them as necessary.

Members raised a question regarding when the Council Tax Support Scheme was last updated. Officers explained that the scheme had remained largely unchanged since its introduction in 2012, aside from adopting an 8.5% discount scheme. This was for maximum liability for working-age claimants on maximum benefit.

The Chair noted that a pre-scrutiny meeting had not taken place as there was no substantive material for the Committee to review in 2025.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

6 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET 12 NOVEMBER 2025 - BALANCING THE BUDGET 2026/27**

The Strategic Director and CFO updated members on the September Medium-Term Financial Strategy, noting additional savings identified since the report. It was reported that with a remaining savings target of approximately £400,000, required efficiencies would likely be met through increases in fees and chargers.

A projected surplus of around £700,000 in 2026/27 was noted, and officers advised that some of this could be used to support priority capital investment due to the reduced capital programme.

It was noted that Cabinet also approved an additional recommendation proposed by Councillor Thomas. This was to introduce one hour's free parking in the Church Lane North Car Park during Hertfordshire County Council's Active Travel works in the Old Town. This would affect around 50 spaces and would cost approximately £5,000. This would be implemented alongside the new parking tariffs in January for six months, or until the works were completed.

It was noted that since the report was written, the Council had received its Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) payment of £1.2 million, and work was underway to use this funding for the flat-block recycling initiative.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

7 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET 12 NOVEMBER 2025 - HRA BUSINESS PLAN**

The Committee received an update on the 30-year HRA Business Plan for the period 2026/27 to 2056/57, which outlined the Council's long-term housing stock management and investment strategy.

Cabinet had welcomed the significant planned investment, including £148million for existing stock over the next five years, £745million over the full plan period, and £457 million allocated for the development of new housing.

The Committee was advised that the financial projections were based on an assumed rent convergence of CPI + 1% + £1, a decision that had yet to be confirmed by central government and would form part of the wider budget setting process. It was reported that, should the £1 convergence not be approved, an additional budgetary pressure of £209,000 could arise in the next financial year.

It was noted that, following reductions to the Right to Buy discount, future sales had been projected at eight properties per year, and this area would require ongoing monitoring.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

8 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET 12 NOVEMBER 2025 - MANAGEMENT OF ESTATES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS POLICY 2025 - 2027**

The Committee received an update on the Management of Estates and Neighbourhoods Policy 2025–27.

It was noted that the policy aimed to support the Council's ambitions to create safe and welcoming neighbourhoods, drive improvements, and set out clear responsibilities for both the Council and residents.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

9 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET 12 NOVEMBER 2025 - RECHARGE POLICY**

The Committee noted that Cabinet had received a report recommending the adoption of a new Housing Recharge Policy.

The report outlined the circumstances in which recharges may apply, while noting that discretion would be used in cases of vulnerability or exceptional circumstances. The policy aimed to ensure a fair and evidence-based approach to recharging.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

10 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET 12 NOVEMBER 2025 - ANNUAL REPORT AND EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ACTION PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE**

The Corporate Policy and Performance Manager, informed Members that the Cabinet had received a report providing an overview of the progress on the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan and Annual Report.

The report outlined the 2024/25 progress update, as well as the 19 identified actions for 2025/26. The Annual Report also set out a range of demographic, resident and workforce data.

During discussion, Members raised a question regarding the interpretation of some demographic data and asked officers to review this. Officers agreed to review this information and to report back to Members on this issue.

Attention was drawn to the ongoing gap between resident earnings and workplace earnings in Stevenage, and its relevance to wider skills, economic work, social inclusion and the environmental impacts of travel to work.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

11 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET 18 NOVEMBER 2025 - LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN HERTFORDSHIRE - SUBMISSION OF FINAL PROPOSAL**

The Committee received an update from the Strategic Director regarding the submission of the final proposal for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Cabinet had noted the indicative resolution of Full Council and following debate, agreed that the four unitary model be identified as the Council's preferred option.

Cabinet had approved the submission of the proposal, and delegated authority was granted to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to finalise and submit Hertfordshire's proposal by 28 November 2025.

Members thanked the officers involved and noted that the Council's approach to the LGR process had been conducted professionally.

The Chair informed the Committee that, prior to the meeting, he had agreed to disapply the call-in provision of the Cabinet decision regarding its preferred option to Government on the LGR submission, due to the urgency of the decision to be submitted by the deadline of 28 November 2025.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

12 **URGENT PART I DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

There were no Urgent Part I Decisions authorised by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

13 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

14 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

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.

15 **PART II MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

meeting held on 14 October 2025 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

16 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE CABINET 12 NOVEMBER 2025 - STATION GATEWAY**

The Assistant Director of Regeneration informed the Committee of the update on the Station Gateway vision under the current Development Management Service Agreement (DSMA) with Muse and the English Cities Fund (ECF).

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

17 **URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

There were no Urgent Part II Decisions authorised by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

18 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

The Committee received an update on the Town Centre Development Finance Report, and it was noted that the Leader had consented to the report being dealt with as a matter of urgency for the reasons set out in the report.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

CHAIR