

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 10 December 2025

Time: 2.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Richard Henry (Chair), Jeannette Thomas (Vice-Chair)
Rob Broom, Coleen De Freitas, Jackie Hollywell, Loraine Rossati,
Simon Speller and Nigel Williams

Start / End Time: Start Time: 2.00pm
End Time: 2.50pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Myla Arceno and Tom Plater.

Councillor Coleen De Freitas declared an interest in Item 5 – Housing Revenue Account Draft Budget and Rent Setting 2026/27 as a Stevenage Borough Council tenant.

2 MINUTES - CABINET 12 NOVEMBER AND 18 NOVEMBER 2025

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 12 November 2025 and the Special meeting on 18 November 2025 be approved as correct records for signature by the Chair.

3 MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY AND SELECT COMMITTEES

Cabinet received a summary of the issues covered at the most recent meeting of the Community Select Committee. The Committee received the interim report and recommendations of the review into Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion at the Council and were happy to conclude the review which had included input from protected characteristic groups earlier in the year.

The final recommendations would be formally agreed by the Committee and then sent to the Cabinet Portfolio for Equalities for formal response in due course.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Community Select Committee meeting be noted.

4 COUNCIL TAX BASE 2026/27

Cabinet received a report seeking Members approval of the Council Tax Base for 2026/27 in line with statutory requirements.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance advised Members that the proposed tax base represented an increase of 239.76 Band D equivalents compared to 2025/26 driven by growth in new properties and adjustments to discounts. It was noted that the revised tax base would feed into the January 2026 budget-setting process and supported the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

Members were reminded that Hertfordshire County Council would continue to receive the largest share of Council Tax (77.58% in 2025/26) with Stevenage Borough Council retaining 10.8% (2025/26).

It was RESOLVED:

1. In accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 2012, the amount calculated by Stevenage Borough Council for the year 2026/27 will be 29,473.9 equivalent "Band D" properties, reduced to 28,884.5 equivalent "Band D" properties after making allowances for a 98.0% collection rate.
2. The 2026/27 Council Tax Base is approved subject to any changes made to the Council Tax Support Scheme (CTS) for 2026/27. The Cabinet approved the CTS scheme at its meeting on 12 November 2025.

5

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT DRAFT BUDGET AND RENT SETTING 2026/27

Cabinet received a report on the proposals for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budgets and rent setting for 2026/27, to be considered by Council on 21 January 2026. The report also gave an update on the formula for setting rents for 2026/27, proposing the HRA rents for 2026/27 and the HRA service charges for 2026/27.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing also gave an update on the 2026/27 HRA budget, incorporating the decisions included in the HRA Business Plan report that was approved at the Cabinet meeting on the 12 November 2025 and the 2026/27 HRA fees and charges approved on the 8 October.

Cabinet were advised that the budget assumed a CPI+1% rent increase (4.8%) from April 2026 with an average weekly rise of £6.72 for social rents and £8.85 for affordable rents. It was noted that service charges would continue to be based on cost recovery, with energy costs remaining the main driver of increases.

The Portfolio Holder reported that the draft budget currently showed a £558,000 surplus, supported by savings of £705,000 and growth items focussed on compliance, tenant engagement and service improvements.

Members were advised that a minimum reserve of £10million had been set to mitigate financial and operational risks, ensuring resilience while progressing towards EPC-C compliance and supporting the Council's long-term housing and sustainability objectives.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance advised that the medium-term

strategy reflected significant investment needs and borrowing to maintain housing stock and deliver new homes. She advised that risks remained around interest rate volatility, rent policy uncertainty and regulatory compliance alongside ambitious saving targets. Future funding had also been earmarked for major repairs and compliance upgrades to ensure tenants had the warm and safe homes they deserved alongside funding for new development which would deliver around 320 homes.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance advised that over the next five years the council had earmarked £240 million for capital works including major repairs and compliance upgrades and also for new development that would deliver around 320 homes, a significant contribution towards the Council's target of delivering 1,000 new social rented and affordable homes by 2029/30.

In response to a question regarding the reduction in social housing numbers as a result of Right to Buy legislation, The Strategic Director and Chief Financial Officer confirmed that the Government had reduced the Right to Buy discount available to tenants from £101,000 to £34,000 which should reduce the number of applications going forward. She also advised that the Business Plan showed a net increase in properties which would help support the housing register.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That HRA dwelling rents be increased (week commencing 1 April 2026) by 4.8%. This equates to an average increase of £6.72 for social rents, £8.85 for affordable rents and £8.19 for Low Start Shared Ownership homes per week (based on a 52-week year) and assuming rent convergence with a £1 per week cap is approved by the Government.
2. That the 2026/27 service charges be approved as set out in paragraph 4.2.
3. That the HRA budget for 2026/27, set out in Appendix A, be approved.
4. The 2026/27 growth options as set out in section 4.4 be approved.
5. That the 2026/27 Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix B be noted.
6. That the revised minimum levels of balances for 2026/27 shown in Appendix C be approved.
7. That the Rent Increase Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIA) appended to the report in Appendix D be approved.
8. That the contingency sum of £500K, within which the Cabinet can approve supplementary estimates, be approved for 2026/27.
9. That the decisions taken on recommendations 2.1 – 2.8 above be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework rules in the Council's Constitution.

10. That key partners and other stakeholders be consulted and their views considered as part of the 2026/27 budget setting process.

6

RELOCATION OF THE LISTER HOSPITAL TAXI RANK

Cabinet received a report seeking approval to revoke the existing taxi rank located at the Lister Hospital, Coreys Mill Lane, Stevenage and to adopt a new taxi rank, 35m from the existing rank on Coreys Mill Lane, in accordance with Section 63 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

The Portfolio Holder advised that due to the planned reconfiguration of the bus terminal, the rank would be removed and relocated and have capacity for four vehicles and would continue to provide safe and direct pedestrian access to the hospital.

The new rank would be constructed prior to the removal of the existing facility to ensure continuity of service. It was noted that a 28-day public consultation had been undertaken resulting in one response from a member of the public, with no objections from the taxi trade or other stakeholders.

It was RESOLVED:

1. That the revocation of the existing, adopted taxi rank located at Lister Hospital, Coreys Mill Lane, Stevenage be approved.
2. That the adoption of the new taxi rank at Lister Hospital, Coreys Mill Lane, Stevenage, which will replace the existing rank being revoked, ensuring continued service provision, improved accessibility, and enhanced pedestrian safety in the area be approved.
3. That the implementation of a temporary taxi rank, located in the vicinity of the existing one, in the event that the new rank cannot be completed prior to the removal of the current provision be approved. This temporary arrangement will ensure the continuity of taxi services. A plan outlining the anticipated location of the temporary taxi rank was attached at Appendix E to the report.

7

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE - QUARTER 2 2025/26

Cabinet received a report highlighting the Council's performance across key priorities and projects for Quarter two 2025/26 and providing an update on delivery of the making Stevenage Even Better programme and the key themes emerging from the Quarter two performance data which showed that that this had been another successful period for the Council.

The Chief Executive gave a presentation covering updates in relation to delivery against Corporate Plan. He referred to a summary of the headline findings from the 2025 Residents' Survey, with overall satisfaction with the local area remaining high, and feedback providing insight into priorities for the local area and how Council services were delivered.

The Chief Executive advised that most of the measures within the Corporate performance Suite were green, there were three red measures where specific attention and active management by officers going forward. These included Housing complaint handling, and the turnover of void properties.

A number of Transforming our Town Highlights were reported including 8 new apprentices recruited, new artwork at the Bus Interchange, planning permission for the new Sports and Leisure Centre and progress on the construction of Claxton House.

Members were pleased to see the pro-active work relating to the red measures and the Portfolio Holder for Housing gave assurance that the improvements would be monitored through the Executive Housing Working Group. She also thanked Officers for the work undertaken on the Housing Improvement Plan which had been recognised by the Housing Regulator.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the service performance against 50 corporate performance measures and progress of key projects in Quarter two 2025/26 through the Making Stevenage Even Better Programme (Appendix A) be noted.
2. That progress with the introduction of Awaab's Law and inclusion of four new measures be noted.
3. That further work on the Housing Complaints Satisfaction pilot and a planned performance clinic be noted.
4. That the improvement actions being taken to improve void turnaround times and deliver value for money for tenants be noted.
5. That the strategic risk updates be noted.

8

DIGITAL STRATEGY

Cabinet received the Digital Strategy 2025/26-2027/28 covering the development of online services which would help to ensure the Council delivered improvements to help residents access digital services quickly and easily.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance advised that the Strategy set out how technology would be used over the next three years building on the progress already made from improving online access to services to supporting staff with better tools. The Strategy would help to strengthen resilience, build digital confidence across the workforce and ensure no resident was left behind as services modernised.

Members welcomed the strategy in particular the emphasis on digital inclusion, proposed improvements to the website and stressed the importance of digitising

records particularly in the light of Local Government Reorganisation.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the adoption of the Digital Strategy 2025/6 -27/28 (Appendix A) be approved.
2. That the four key priorities to: develop digital solutions, improve the website and intranet, adopt AI, and drive the use of digital services be noted.
3. That it be noted that the Digital Strategy strengthens resilience, standardisation, and digital capability to ensure the Council is 'fighting fit' for Local Government Reorganisation and supports the Corporate Plan priority of Balancing the Budget.
4. That it be noted that significant opportunities have been identified to further utilise digital services in high priority services, to continue to provide non-digital support and service access for vulnerable people who require it, and that lessons have been learned from digital development work already completed.

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 12 NOVEMBER AND 18 NOVEMBER 2025**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the Cabinet held on 12 November and the special meeting on 18 November 2025 be approved as correct records and signed by the Chair.

12 **LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT - AGENCY PROPOSAL**

The Cabinet considered a Part II report in respect of the Leisure Management Contract

– Agency Proposal.

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

13 **THE PROVISION OF FIRE DOOR INSTALLS, INSPECTIONS AND REMEDIAL WORK TO FLAT FRONT ENTRANCES AND COMMUNAL FIRE DOORS**

The Cabinet considered a Part II report in respect of the Provision of Fire Door installs, Inspections and Remedial Work to Flat Front Entrances and Communal Fire Doors.

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

14 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR