

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 17 December 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, Peter Clark, Alistair Gordon, Lynda Guy, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell, Mason Humberstone, Lin Martin-Haugh, Andy McGuinness, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Ellie Plater, 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: 9.45pm

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

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Sandra Barr, Forhad Chowdhury, Coleen De Freitas, Akin Elekolusi and Sarah Mead

Councillors Claire Parris, Loraine Rossati, Myla Arceno, Peter Wilkins, Tom Wren and Robin Parker declared the following interest in Item 10 – Notice of Motions – Renters Rights Act 2025:

‘For the purposes of transparency I wish to declare that I am a landlord/or tenant but as the motion on renters rights does not directly relate to my Disclosable Pecuniary Interest nor will it impact on my ability to uphold the Nolan Principles I intend to participate and vote on it this evening.’

2 **MINUTES - 15 OCTOBER AND SPECIAL MEETING 17 NOVEMBER 2025**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Council Meeting on 15 October and Special Meeting on 17 November 2025 be approved as correct records and signed by the Mayor.

3 **MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Mayor congratulated and welcomed Councillor Rob Henry who had been elected in the Roebuck Ward at the recent By-Election. Councillor Richard Henry, Leader of the Council welcomed Rob and congratulated him on his election. Councillor Rob Henry thanked the Mayor and Leader for their welcomes.

The Mayor spoke about the recent terrible event in Australia on Bondi Beach resulting in 15 people losing their lives. She asked Council to stand for a moment of reflection for those affected by the incident.

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

- A tour of Parliament with Councillor Dermot Kehoe and Kevin Bonavia MP including the opportunity to sit in a House of Commons debate;
- A number of Diwali events;
- The High Sheriff of Hertford's Justice Service;
- The Stevenage ladies Choir Jingle Bells Rock concert with Councillor Jim Brown;

The Mayor advised that as Christmas approached, she was proud of coming from a mixed heritage family celebrating Christmas, Diwali, Eid and other festivals and recognised how powerful it was when different cultures came together enriching lives.

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 Youth Mayor and Deputy Youth Mayor gave an update on their recent work.

Since starting in May 2025, they had attended a number of council and community events including attending Goodwood's Festival of Speed, being invited to the Rotary Club's Winter Ball and being VIPs at the Dick Whittington and his Cat Pantomime at the Gordon Craig Theatre.

The Youth Mayor and Deputy Youth Mayor had shared their thoughts and ideas as part of the working party group shaping the Youth Advisory Board & Youth Action Group and agreed to take part in all Schools' Parliament meetings to ensure primary schools were connected with them and they recently used a community event to hear directly from young people in Stevenage and to share what they did in their roles.

The Youth Mayor and Deputy Youth Mayor advised that they had asked the Mayor and Councillor Coleen De Freitas to support them in offering assemblies to secondary schools with a focus on the importance of voting, education and celebrating differences and they hoped that schools would be keen to book them in.

They advised that they were looking forward to continuing their work in 2026.

7 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Council noted that a response to the question submitted by Jennifer Huygen regarding lighting in Fairlands Valley Park had been published in the supplementary agenda for the meeting.

Jennifer Huygen was present at the meeting and asked the following supplementary question:

Does the Council agree that outdoor safety for all residents, particularly women and girls was a priority and that therefore the lighting in Fairlands Valley Park should be implemented as soon as possible and could the Council clarify when the park would have the wildlife friendly lighting installed to ensure that residents did not have to spend another winter avoiding this key active travel route in the Town.

Councillor Rob Broom, Portfolio Holder for Environment, thanked Ms Huygens for her patience with what had been a long process. He advised that the investigations and drawing together the information around the bat report were currently underway and he envisaged that the Council would reach an informed decision which strived to balance public safety, resource pressures and ecological considerations in the park. He invited Ms Huygens to a meeting in the new year to discuss the findings and hopefully arrive at a sustainable and amicable outcome for all.

8 LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S UPDATE

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

Does the Leader of the Council think it acceptable to build blocks of flats to house families in order to fulfil the Government's demand that the country builds 1.5million homes in a town where homes once meant houses with separated bedrooms and gardens for children?

The Leader of the Council referred to the housing crisis in the country and reminded Councillor Booth that the Council was building houses as well as flats across the town.

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

- Digital Strategy and Frequency Coffee;
- BIZ4BIZ Awards and New Mentoring Opportunities;
- National plan to end homelessness and the development at Dunn Close;
- Park Visits;
- Community Select Committee and Older People;
- Tenant Consultation;
- County Lines;
- Stevenage 80th Anniversary;
- LGR Update and Indoor Market and new Engineering Campus.

UPDATE FROM SCRUTINY CHAIRS

Councillor Jim Brown, Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, provided updates for Council from the meetings held since the Council meeting in October:

He advised that alongside the scheduled meetings, a number of informal in-depth meetings had been held to cover its work programme items. Items considered at those meetings included the following and Members asked a number of questions regarding these items:

- The Council's Local Government Reorganisation submission, including how the modelling for each option had been established; the financial challenges under each option; the impact on prospective candidates who worked for legacy authorities; clarity on foundation authorities and various impacts of aggregation and disaggregation of each authority's debts and assets;
- Five finance reports including; (i) 2nd Quarter monitoring report for the general fund, (ii) HRA and capital, Mid-Year Treasury Management Review, (iii) Council Tax Support Scheme, (iv) Balancing the Budget priorities for 2026/27 and (v) upgraded 30 Year HRA Business Plan;
- Management of Estates and Neighbourhoods Policy and the Housing Re-Charge Policy;
- Annual Report of Equalities, Diversity & Inclusion and Action Plan Progress Update and
- Part II items relating to the Station Gateway and an urgent decision relating to Claxton House;
- Corporate Communications and Marketing and the Member Enquiries YourSay system.
- Two further finance reports on the Council Tax Base 2026/27 and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Draft Budget and Rent Setting for 2026/27;
- Relocation of Lister Hospital Taxi Rank;
- Corporate Performance Q2 2025-26;
- Digital Strategy
- Two Part II reports relating to the Leisure Management Contract and Fire Doors in the Council's Flat Blocks and Housing Stock

The Chair of the Community Select Committee, Councillor Ellie Plater advised that the Committee had received the interim report and recommendations of the review of Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion. A number of recommendations were made which focussed on:

- encouraging a more diverse range of people involved in community leadership roles;
- Increased collaboration between Members and the Equalities Commission Legacy Group;
- Voices and lived experience of the trans community would be invited into discussions and events to help combat misconceptions and hatred;
- Carrying out an audit of the provision of benches and seating in the town centre;
- Addressing concerns around digital exclusion for older people alongside concerns raised by Age Concern around the lack of provision of mobility scooter

- hire service from the bus interchange;
- Addressing the needs of young people by supporting extracurricular activities in schools and in the community via sports, interests and social clubs; supporting neurodiversity to encourage better collaboration between the Council and external mental health experts and addressing the needs of the sight loss community regarding street furniture and accessibility screens in the bus interchange.

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

The Committee had also held a meeting focused on services directed at Older People and had made the following observations:

- Linked to the Age Friendly Hertfordshire initiative there was a commitment to audit the number of rest stops in the town. Officers had carried out an audit and found that there were a large amount of benches in the town;
- Members had heard some concerning statistics regarding the number of over 65s who had a dementia diagnosis and linked to this welcomed the work the Council was involved in, in partnership with the Alzheimer's Society, to provide the taxi trade with dementia training;
- the work that diverse business units and officers across the Council were providing with regards to supporting older people including Sheltered housing, communities and neighbourhoods, health and leisure services was welcomed. The provision of modern bespoke sheltered accommodation such as Brodie Court was proving very popular with older people.

Councillor Leanne Brady, Chair of the Environment & Economy Select Committee advised that an informal meeting including a presentation from the Lead officer had been held focussing on Climate Change. The focus of the presentation and discussion was on the annual climate change report to Cabinet and included clarification of how the Council was meeting its targets.

A further meeting had been held to consider the draft report and recommendations on the review of recycling in flat blocks. She advised that the key finding was that there was not a 'one size fits all approach' that could be adopted to deliver recycling in the flat blocks, each flat block and location requiring a bespoke approach, making it complicated to deliver.

The Review made a number of recommendations including:

- The promotion of recycling champions and work with young residents;
- The use of large, infographic stickers on bins to differentiate recycling bins;
- At Bring Bank sites consider the use of mobile CCTV to enable follow up actions including education and civil prosecution;
- Measures to counter fly-tipping around bin stores; and
- Use of easy to understand and easy to do recycling methods at flat blocks.

Following the updates, the Leader of the Council thanked the three Scrutiny Chairs for the important work undertaken by their committees and reminded members of

the Council's commitment to scrutiny through resources and funding. He also advised that he and the Deputy leader had recently met with the three chairs and recommendations on improvements to the work and the programme were with officers for consideration.

10 NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Renters Rights Act 2025

Councillor Jackie Hollywell moved the following motion:

'This Council welcomes the Renters' Rights Act 2025 — long-overdue reform that finally puts renters' rights first. The Act, coming into force in May 2026, ends "no-fault" Section 21 evictions, creates open-ended periodic tenancies, strengthens repair standards, and gives renters clearer routes to challenge unfair rent increases.

For the estimated 5,000 households who privately rent in Stevenage, this legislation means real security: no more being pushed out of their homes with two months' notice, no more landlords dodging their responsibilities, and no more uncertainty about the basics — safe homes, fair rents, and predictable tenancies.

Since 1980, there has been a drastic reduction in the amount of social housing in Stevenage and the UK. A significant number of those homes are now owned by private landlords and the residents pay higher rents with fewer rights than they would have had as social housing tenants.

Labour councillors have consistently argued for these changes, and the Act finally delivers many of the reforms for which renters have waited years, including:

- Abolition of fixed-term assured shorthold tenancies (ASTs) and the move to periodic tenancies, giving renters more stability and choice.
- Stronger legal duties on landlords to maintain homes, tackle hazards and carry out timely repairs.
- Limits on advance rent and fees, so renters are not forced into financial insecurity simply to secure a home.
- A clear right to request pets, with landlords needing a good reason to refuse.
- New enforcement powers for councils — expanded civil penalties, better investigatory tools, and required reporting of enforcement activity.
- A national landlord database, improving transparency and helping councils tackle criminal and rogue landlords.

This Council resolves to:

1. Actively promote renters' new rights — making sure tenants know how to use them, how to report poor conditions, and how to challenge illegal behaviour.
2. Set clear expectations for landlords and letting agents, explaining their new duties under the Act and what full compliance looks like in Stevenage.
3. Strengthen the Council's enforcement capacity so that we are ready from day one to act against unlawful evictions, sub-standard homes and non-compliant landlords.
4. Write to the Minister for Housing, welcoming the introduction of long-overdue

protections for renters, and suggesting that additional funding for councils will be needed to do justice to this Act and achieve the Government's ambitions for renters.

5. Champion renters locally, ensuring that Stevenage leads the way in delivering a fairer, safer and more secure private rented sector.

In moving the motion, Councillor Hollywell advised that she welcomed this new legislation which had received Royal Assent in October and would come into force in May 2026. The Act was important to the well-being of residents, and represented the most significant expansion of tenant protections in many years, improving housing standards and the creation of a fairer relationship between landlords and renters.

She advised that the Act would abolish no fault evictions, ensuring that landlords could no longer remove tenants without a valid reason, giving families stability. The Act also ended fixed term contracts replacing them with rolling tenancies. Although there was some concern about the reduction to the rights of landlords, she advised that good landlords would have no concerns as they should already be complying with the legislation.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Peter Clark advised that the Act provided a transformative platform for the private rented sector for stability and mutual respect between landlords and tenants. Stable tenancies would also foster stronger neighbourhood ties and social cohesion and help to ensure more stable school life for children

Councillor Booth, Leader of the Opposition advised that he welcomed the legislation and the Lib Dem Group would be supporting the motion but expressed disappointment that the Labour Government had not introduced the Legislation earlier in their term.

A number of other Members spoke mainly in support of the motion and made the following comments:

- Importance was stressed regarding the fundamental nature of a secure home;
- The number of reasonable tenants with unscrupulous landlords far outweighed the number of unscrupulous tenants;
- The Council must ensure that the level of staff and resources was sufficient to address the new enforcement responsibilities on the Council;
- The Act failed to properly consider and address the adverse impact this would have on the housing market;
- The Act would result in fewer homes to rent and higher rents;
- Additional burdens would be placed on an already stretched council budget;
- The Motion reflected the Government's action on delivering a manifesto commitment. The security for private renters should result in a reduction in homelessness, the need for homelessness prevention and a reduction in people calling on the Council services

Following further debate, Councillor Hollywell, thanked Members for their contributions.

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

A Green Enterprise Partnership and Incentive Scheme in Stevenage

Councillor Peter Wilkins moved the following motion:

This Council notes that:

- Forward thinking local authorities throughout the UK are providing incentives and encouragement for local businesses to introduce innovative sustainability schemes in partnership with industry experts.
- Through this collaboration local businesses can reduce their environmental impact and reinvest savings in sustainability.
- Central to this success is the **GO GREEN scheme**, the UK's first green tax incentive for SMEs, funded by the Government's shared prosperity fund.

This Council believes that:

- Stevenage must take proactive steps to support local businesses in reducing carbon emissions to achieve net-zero targets.
- A scheme similar to the award-winning GO GREEN scheme introduced by Sutton Council would strengthen the local economy, encourage sustainable practices, and demonstrate leadership in environmental innovation.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. Commission a report into establishing a Green Enterprise Partnership in Stevenage, engaging with local business networks, sustainability organisations and strategic partners.
2. Investigate the introduction of a GO GREEN-type incentive, providing significant business rates relief to SMEs that commit to measurable carbon reduction plans.
3. Develop a comprehensive roadmap for supporting businesses in transitioning to sustainable operations, including access to expert advice, certification schemes and reinvestment opportunities.
4. Report back to Full Council within six months with findings, recommendations and an implementation plan for Stevenage's own Green Enterprise Partnership.

In moving the Motion, Councillor Wilkins advised that Stevenage had always been a town that led from being the UK's first new town to hosting worldclass science and technology firms and that innovation was key to the Town. This motion outlined an opportunity to build on that legacy and set the direction for sustainability. He advised that the London Borough of Sutton had adopted a Go Green Scheme which was the UK's first green tax incentive for local enterprises and had helped local businesses to cut carbon emissions by up to 30% in 2years while unlocking thousands of pounds worth of savings that could be reinvested into further sustainability measures. The motion proposed that Stevenage investigate and look at the feasibility of introducing a green enterprise partnership to bring together local

businesses and sustainability experts to provide practical support, expert advice and incentives to reduce carbon emissions and work towards net zero. Significant business rate relief would be given to businesses to achieve these goals as studies showed that sustainable businesses were 21% more profitable on average and that councils that led on green innovation attracted new investment and jobs into the area.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Stephen Booth advised that the key dates for net zero loomed closer and this motion outlined a scheme which could help to achieve the target. Schools would be encouraged to get involved and funds would be available for businesses under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to help businesses get on board. The scheme was designed to curb energy consumption, encourage cleaner energy and encourage businesses to embrace sustainability.

During further debate, the following points were raised:

- Carbon reduction was essential but the proposed scheme would duplicate many existing provisions whilst also creating potential financial risks for the Council;
- A number of business support mechanisms were already in place including green business grants, SmartGo Stevenage and a winter action zero programme outnumbering the businesses supported by the London Borough of Sutton;
- The reduction of business rates at a time of ongoing pressure on local authorities finances would impact the Council's ability to fund essential services;
- Advice was also available to local businesses through the Hertfordshire Growth Board;
- The Council already supported businesses through a number of programmes including 200 funded gold memberships with the aim of enabling local businesses achieve net zero;
- The business rates reduction would incentivise local businesses to adopt carbon reduction initiatives.

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

Protecting Family Homes and Community Cohesion in Stevenage

Councillor Rob Henry moved the following motion:

This Council notes that:

1. Residents have raised concerns about the use of hotels and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) within Stevenage to accommodate people arriving via irregular migration routes and other Government placement schemes.
2. The conversion of family homes into HMOs can place pressure on parking, waste services, community cohesion, anti-social behaviour management, and the supply of family housing across the town.
3. Stevenage Borough Council has existing powers in relation to licensing, enforcement, and planning policy, including the ability to review and amend Article 4 Directions.

This Council believes:

1. Stevenage residents should receive clear information on how temporary accommodation is being used locally and the impact on services.
2. The Council should use its planning and housing powers to protect residential balance and prevent inappropriate HMO proliferation.

This Council resolves to:

1. Publish a quarterly summary, open and accessible to Members and residents, outlining:
 - The number of placements made into local hotels or HMOs via Home Office or other external schemes;
 - The general type of accommodation used (hotel, HMO, other);
 - Any direct costs to the Council or local services.
2. Write to the Home Office and other responsible agencies requesting routine, timely communication with the Council regarding local placements to support service planning.
3. Undertake a review of existing HMO licensing and enforcement, with the aim of:
 - Identifying unlicensed HMOs;
 - Ensuring compliance with safety, amenity and management standards.
4. Amend or expand Article 4 Directions where evidence shows:
 - A concentration of HMOs is affecting residential amenity, parking or local services;
 - Family housing stock is being reduced and community cohesion is or at risk of being impacted.
5. Update local planning guidance so that new HMO applications must clearly demonstrate:
 - Adequate room sizes and waste storage;
 - Sufficient parking provision;
 - Effective management arrangements.

In moving the Motion, Councillor Rob Henry advised that during his election campaign the local residents in his ward had raised concerns about the use of hotels and houses in multiple occupation (HMO's) to accommodate people arriving by irregular migration routes and other Government placement schemes. The conversion of family homes into HMO's put pressure on parking, waste services, community cohesion and antisocial behaviour management which should be a concern for all Members. The Council had existing powers in relation to licensing and enforcement and planning policy and had the ability to review and amend Article 4 directions, a planning tool for Councils to remove specific permitted development right in defined areas. Residents should be given clear information from the Council on how temporary accommodation was being used and the impact this use had on services. The motion would help the Council manage the reality of the current situation that the town faced using existing legislation.

Councillor Mason Humberstone seconded the motion. He advised that the intention of the motion was to put Stevenage residents first. The Council had failed to use its powers to respond to the use of HMOs. Unlicensed and poorly managed HMOs undermined neighbourhoods and damaged community cohesion and this motion

aimed to restore balance to the town. He advised that quarterly public reporting on placements, accommodation types and costs was a standard the Council should comply with.

During further debate, the following points were raised:

- A councillor felt that there was a disconnect between the Home Office requirements of HMOs used to house asylum seekers and council requirements;
- It was inappropriate to house asylum seekers locally in hotels and HMOs and also ex-military sites. The answer was for robust immigration controls;
- The motion was not reasonable as it was deeply cynical with a misleading focus on HMOs. The Council had no powers to decide who would occupy such properties in private ownership;
- The existing licensing powers on HMOs required stock condition surveys to be undertaken. Stevenage did not have a high number of these properties and any issues were addressed by the enforcement team including gas and electrical safety and the maintenance of heating, lighting and sanitation alongside overcrowding issues;
- The motion did not reflect reality as the HMOs within the town were less than 1% of dwellings in Stevenage;
- The Council had strong, robust controls, compliant with national law in relation to the properties and every new HMO reflected these;

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

11

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO CHAIRS/PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

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

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

(A) Question from Councillor Peter Wilkins re: Air Quality Monitoring

Supplementary question –the existing Local Air Quality Plan had been produced in 2003. What progress have we made on developing a new plan?

The Portfolio Holder advised that he would provide a written response to Councillor Wilkins.

(B) Question from Councillor Phil Bibby re: compensation for market stall holders

Supplementary question – although individual accounts had been looked at, how flexible was the Council given the constraints that some traders were under particularly in respect of supply chain issues, in relation to communicating the availability of compensation to stall holders.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that all stall holders were being encouraged to apply for any additional compensation that they may need and

the Town Centre manager had been in communication with them. Each application would be dealt with on its merits and would be treated fairly.

(C) Question from Councillor Robin Parker regarding: mechanical sweeper

Supplementary question – when was the new sweeper purchased, when did it start being used and what proportion of the Borough had been covered and had the number of complaints reduced?

The Portfolio Holder advised that he would ask officers to respond to Councillor Parker as a review of fleet vehicles was currently underway.

(D) Question from Councillor Stephen Booth regarding: Council employees

Supplementary question – Councillors should be advised on a regular basis about staff turnover and not have to utilise the MyView system.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources advised that additional training on the MyView application was available if Members felt this was needed.

(E) Question from Councillor Tom Wren regarding: commercial property tenants

Supplementary question – there is currently a nationwide problem with commercial properties being used for money laundering and other illegal activities. Does the Portfolio Holder believe the Council has adequate clauses within its tenancy agreements to be able to terminate them when there was relevant evidence.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council did have the adequate clauses to address these issues.

(F) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness regarding: the Major Refurbishment Works

Supplementary question – over 300 leaseholders had not yet received bills for the works and the uncertainty was having a detrimental impact on people's lives. How much is this costing the Council due to invoicing delays?

The Portfolio Holder for Housing advised that she would respond to Councillor McGuinness in writing with a fully detailed response.

(G) Question from Councillor Rob Henry regarding: Council Finances

Supplementary question – is there a timescale to reduce the level of debt?

The Portfolio Holder advised that the HRA debt was a 30 year plan and the General Fund was over a much shorter period of time.

(H) Question from Councillor Mason Humberstone regarding: Community Cohesion

Supplementary question – will the Leader of the Council confirm that he was against any attempt to house illegal migrants in HMO's in the Town?

The Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities advised that the Council did not have any powers over private landlords and who could and could not be housed in private HMO's.

12 **MID YEAR TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2025/26 AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS**

The Council considered a report updating Members on the Treasury Management activities in 2025/26 and review effectiveness of the 2025/26 treasury Management and Investment Strategy including the 2025/26 prudential and treasury indicators. 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 2025/26 Mid-Year Treasury Management Review, revised Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and Prudential indicators report be approved.

13 **COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS - UPDATE REPORT**

The Council considered a report requiring a review of the Committee Memberships on the Council following the constitution of a new political group on the Council and in accordance with Regulation 17 of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990.

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

At this juncture Councillor Andy McGuinness thanked Councillor Booth for his service as Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group as Councillor Booth would be stepping down from 1 January 2026. Councillor Richard Henry and the Mayor also thanked Councillor Booth for his work and congratulated Councillor McGuinness on his appointment as Leader of the Group.

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED**

1. That the current Committee Memberships following the constitution of a new political group on the Council be reviewed.
2. That the size and political composition for the following bodies that form the non-Executive Member level decision making structure of the Council be approved, subject to the rules of proportionality where appropriate for 100 Committee places where applicable (relevant Committees are identified thus*)

—

- Overview and Scrutiny Committee* – 14 Members (11 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Member, 1 Conservative Member)
- Community Select Committee* – 10 Members (7 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members, 1 Reform UK Member)
- Environment and Economy Select Committee* – 11 Members (8 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members, 1 Reform UK Member)
- Planning & Development Committee* – 14 Members (11 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members, 1 Reform UK Member)
- Licensing Committee – 14 Members (12 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members)
- General Purposes Committee* – 14 Members (12 Labour Members, 2 Liberal Democrat Members)
- Appointments Committee* – 8 Members (7 Labour Members, 1 Liberal Democrat Member)
- Standards Committee* – 8 Members (6 Labour Members, 1 Liberal Democrat Member, 1 Conservative Member)
- Audit Committee* – 10 Members (7 Labour Members, 1 Liberal Democrat Member, 1 Reform UK Member, 1 Conservative Member) + 1 Co-opted non-elected member
- Statement of Accounts Committee* – 8 Members (6 Labour Members, 1 Liberal Democrat Member, 1 Reform UK Member)
- Joint Consultative Committee* – 3 Members (2 Labour Members, 1 Liberal Democrat Member)

* Indicates where those bodies covered by the rules of proportionality for the purposes of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups), Regulations 1990 – total Committee places being 100

3. That the Memberships of the various Committees, as set out in Appendix A, be approved.
4. That it be noted that the Leader of the Reform UK Group is Cllr Mason Humberstone and that the Deputy Leader of the Group is Cllr Rob Henry.
5. That it be noted that the Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group will be Cllr Andy McGuinness with effect from 1 January 2026, and the Deputy Leader of the Group will be Cllr Stephen Booth.

14

DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE EXECUTIVE UNDER THE SPECIAL URGENCY PROVISIONS OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES (EXECUTIVE ARRANGEMENTS) (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2012

The Council considered a report in respect of the decision(s) taken by the Cabinet in accordance with the Special Urgency provisions of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

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

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

15 **2026 FLEXIBLE VOTING PILOTS**

The Council considered a report in respect of the invitation from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for applications from local authorities in England to pilot schemes at local elections in May 2026, with the objective of making voting in person more efficient, more convenient, and in line with the expectations of modern voters.

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

Upon the motion being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED:**

1. That Council participation in the Government's 2026 Flexible Voting Pilots be approved, and that the 2026 the pilot submission will include:
 - a centralised voting hub based at the Council's offices in Daneshill House, available for all electors to vote at on Polling Day (in addition to their designated polling station); and,
 - early in-person voting, commencing a week before Polling Day (on Thursday 30 April), to include the weekend and Bank Holiday Monday, at the same centralised voting hub as above. The proposed hours of poll would be from 9am to 7pm on weekdays and Saturday, and then from 10am to 4pm on Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday.
2. That authority be delegated to the Returning Officer to determine with MHCLG the necessary arrangements of the pilots; agreeing the final details for the pilots that will be administered in Stevenage.

16 **AUDIT COMMITTEE MINUTES**

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

CHAIR