

COUNCIL – 21 JANUARY 2026

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Questions to Portfolio Holders / Committee Chairs

(A) Question from Councillor Julie Ashley-Wren

Fire brigades nationally have been warning about the increasing danger of fires from lithium-ion batteries in e-scooters and home modified e-bikes. The London Fire Brigade recently announced there have been 169 e-bike and 36 e-scooter fires in the capital up to the end of September, sadly resulting in two fatalities

What proactive action is the Council taking to reduce the risks of these serious fires in our council properties, and in particular within our flat blocks?

Answer (Councillor Jackie Hollywell):

In accordance with the Fire Safety Policy, which can be found via the *Fire Safety Policy 2024* link, a number of measures are in place to mitigate the risk of fire in communal areas of flat blocks, particularly in relation to items containing lithium-ion batteries such as mobility scooters, e-bikes and e-scooters. Fire risk assessments (FRAs) are undertaken regularly for all blocks within the scope of the Fire Safety Order, with frequencies ranging from one to three years depending on the level of risk identified by the Fire Risk Assessor. These assessments identify any fire safety risks within the common parts of multi-occupied buildings and set out the remedial actions required. All actions are tracked through to completion, with performance reported monthly to the Executive Housing Working Group quarterly to Cabinet.

The Fire Safety Policy specifically states that SBC does not permit the storage of mobility scooters within internal communal areas. Residents must also not store or charge e-scooters or other lithium-ion-powered vehicles in their homes or in any part of council-owned or managed buildings unless agreed in writing. To support this, quarterly block inspections are carried out to confirm that remedial actions have been completed and to identify any new risks, which are addressed in collaboration with Housing colleagues.

Guidance for tenants and leaseholders on lithium-ion battery safety is available on the Council's website via the [Mobility Scooters, E-Bikes and E-Scooters](#), and an article has been published in the resident newsletter to further raise awareness.

From a tenancy management perspective, Housing officers follow up enquiries from the Building Safety Team and address any issues they identify during block visits and tenancy audits. Estate inspections and estate days will commence in March 2026 to provide additional assurance. Items deemed an immediate fire risk are removed, while lower-risk items receive advice and a removal notice under the TORT procedure. Independent Living Schemes benefit from additional measures, including scooter pods (prioritised for those

with mobility needs), daily inspections by ILS officers, quarterly inspections with residents, and annual fire safety talks delivered by the Fire Service, who are also available to attend resident meetings where concerns arise. The tenancy agreement is currently under review and will include clauses specifically relating to lithium-ion battery-operated items.

A fire safety risk relating to lithium-ion batteries is included on the SBC Strategic Risk Register. This is a shared risk across Housing and Leisure and Environmental Services (Stevenage Direct Services) and is monitored regularly. In addition, the Council plans to hold a communal area safety week this quarter and staff have received awareness training to support this work.

(B) Question from Councillor Robin Parker

The SBC website states that Chronicle magazine is delivered up to 5 times a year. How many times was it actually delivered in 2023, 2024 and 2025; how many addresses were missed each time; what checking was done (and how) to obtain these figures; what remedial action is taken for missed addresses?

Answer: (Councillor Richard Henry)

We have updated the SBC website to reflect the change made in 2023 to the publication schedule for Chronicle magazine, which has been produced three times a year since then, initially due to by-elections affecting production and delivery timetables.

Chronicle is delivered to approximately 36,000 households across Stevenage, and the Council has strengthened oversight of delivery to ensure full coverage. Delivery staff use GPS-tracked routes, allowing us officers to monitor street-level progress, supported by officer-led spot checks during the delivery period to verify accuracy on the ground. Once each delivery window closes, tracker data is reviewed against planned rounds to confirm that all streets have been covered. Where this monitoring identifies any missed addresses, the contractor is instructed to revisit and complete those areas immediately and any failures are logged as part of our ongoing performance management to prevent recurrence.

(C) Question from Councillor Booth

Regarding the new food waste disposal scheme, I understand that DEFRA will be covering the initial set-up costs of this, the Government's so-called "Simpler Recycling" scheme, how will ongoing and annual service costs be met and how much will this amount to annually? Given that waste collection authorities may decide "frequency and methodology for collection in a way that meets local needs and provides value for money for taxpayers" what consideration has been given to alternative collection methods to that proposed by the Council?

Answer (Councillor Rob Broom):

The new weekly food waste collection service is estimated to cost £554k, and the Government has provided new burdens funding to support this. As part of

the wider local government funding settlement, the Council received £1 million more than originally anticipated. Although the settlement did not itemise a specific allocation for food waste, the Government has confirmed that the funding for new food waste requirements is included within this additional settlement amount.

The introduction of weekly food waste collections forms part of the Government's Simpler Recycling legislation, which requires all councils to provide a consistent core set of recycling services. Stevenage will begin the town-wide roll-out of weekly food waste collections in March 2026. Further information is available here: [Food Waste](#).

In addition, the Government has mandated the separate collection of plastic film from 31 March 2027, and the Council will develop detailed operational arrangements for this closer to the implementation date.

As we move toward Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), there are no further planned changes to the existing waste and recycling service beyond this. Our ongoing focus will remain on waste reduction, minimisation and further improving recycling performance

(D) Question from Councillor Wilkins

The Council website states it aims to remove offensive graffiti before other graffiti, and within one day of receiving a report, and all other graffiti within five days. Can you provide data that shows the councils performance against these standards for removing graffiti and offensive graffiti?

Answer: (Councillor Rob Broom)

The Council collates response times regarding graffiti reporting and removal. Currently this data does not differentiate between 'graffiti' and 'offensive graffiti', although officer experience suggests offensive graffiti reports are less than one per month.

For the 12 month period January to December 2025, there were 110 reports, 95 of which are closed which is 86%.

Graffiti is a blight, and we encourage everyone to report it; additional information can be found here:

<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/environment/street-care-and-cleaning/graffiti>

(E) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

What costs have been already incurred by the Council and how much officer time has been taken up in dealing with Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire?

Answer: (Councillor Richard Henry)

Following publication of the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024 and the Government's invitation in February 2025 to develop proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), Hertfordshire authorities submitted an Interim Plan in March and a final submission on 28 November 2025. To support this work, a county wide LGR programme team was established, supported locally by Council officers. Between September and November 2025, key senior officers—including the Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer, Service Lead for LGR and Head of Corporate Policy—were dedicating a significant proportion of their time to LGR activity, supported by two Business Change officers (around 40% of their time) and additional service specialists contributing to technical workstreams and consultation.

With the submission now completed, work has shifted to transition planning for the creation of new unitary authorities by April 2028. This is the most significant restructuring of local government since 1974 and requires coordination across £1.2bn of annual expenditure, £2bn of debt, 12,000 staff and approximately 1,300 ICT systems. The transition programme will involve large scale service aggregation, disaggregation and redesign of services, governance restructuring, staff transfers, ICT migration and contract novation, with major implications for statutory and frontline services.

To date, Hertfordshire has received £387,077 of Government funding to support the first phase of LGR, primarily covering consultancy support from IMPOWER and public consultation delivered through Connect PA. Stevenage Borough Council has allocated a further £50K in its 2025/26 budget. In addition, the Council's draft General Fund Budget proposes a further £1m over the next two years to support the resourcing and delivery of LGR transition activity.

(F) Question from Councillor Tom Wren

At the council meeting held on 24th July 2019 I asked a question asking for figures for the number of council trees felled and replanted in the proceeding 3 years. This showed the council was not meeting it's pledge to plant replacements trees nearby for all felled trees. Please could the same figures be provided for each year 2020-2025.

Answer: (Councillor Rob Broom)

I'm pleased to report the following numbers of trees that were removed and planted over the past six years:

Year	Tree removals	Standard trees planted	Net position
2020	149	189	+40
2021	122	166	+44
2022	112	158	+46
2023	109	111	+2
2024	112	90	-22
2025	107	109	+2
TOTALS	711	823	+112

In addition:

2023 – 3,000 whips were planted in Fairlands Valley for the Fairlane Woodland extension

2024 – 5,000 whips were planted for the Miyawaki woods at St Nicholas Park, Hampson Park and Shephalbury Park

2025 – 3,000 whips were planted in Symonds Green, Chells Park and Peartree Park

(Standard tree = an established tree of approx. 3m

Whips = smaller trees, between 30cm and 60cm)

(G) Question from Councillor Rob Henry

Does the Labour administration agree with me that free, fair, and open elections are fundamental to our democratic process and must be protected without exception?

Answer: (Councillor Richard Henry)

The Council agrees that free, fair and open elections are a fundamental element of the UK's democratic system, and the current administration is committed to upholding those principles at all times. Democratic accountability, transparency, and the right of residents to elect their representatives are central to the proper functioning of local government.

The circumstances currently facing Stevenage, and Hertfordshire more widely, are, however, exceptional. The Government has confirmed its intention to undertake Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), replacing the existing district and county arrangements with new unitary authorities from April 2028. This represents the most significant structural change to local governance in over fifty years and requires a high degree of stability, clarity, and operational capacity during the transition period.

In such situations, successive Governments have had long established provisions to enable temporary postponement of local elections where councils are approaching abolition or structural change. This has occurred in several areas in recent years including Buckinghamshire, Cumbria, North Yorkshire, Somerset, Dorset and others, to avoid holding elections for authorities that would only continue for a short period and to ensure democratic processes remain aligned to the new governance structures being created.

Any postponement of the May 2026 elections would therefore be a technical and time limited measure designed to maintain democratic clarity and protect public resources during the transition. Importantly, by elections would continue to take place where required, ensuring that residents remain fully

represented throughout. Residents would also take part in the shadow authority elections in May 2027, which will determine the membership of the new unitary arrangements.

It is also essential to emphasise that the decision to postpone elections rests solely with the Secretary of State, not with this Council. The Council's role is to provide evidence, assessment and, where appropriate, a recommendation based on the best interests of residents and the safe, effective delivery of LGR.

In summary, the Council supports free, fair and open elections as a core democratic principle. Within the specific and exceptional context of LGR, a temporary postponement, if determined appropriate by the Secretary of State, would be intended to protect democratic integrity rather than diminish it, ensuring residents vote for the right authority, at the right time, within a stable and transparent governance framework.

(H) Question from Councillor Mason Humberstone

Can this administration explain what it is doing to ensure that local infrastructure and essential services are not overwhelmed by the increasing number of new developments in our town?

Answer: (Councillor Richard Henry)

The Council is committed to ensuring that growth does not overwhelm local infrastructure or essential services by applying a robust, multi-layered approach. Through legal mechanisms such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 agreements, we secure funding and obligations from developers for roads, schools, health facilities, sports and leisure facilities, employment and skills, green spaces along with securing affordable housing, as detailed in our Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

Details of what CIL and s.106 contributions the Council has secured can be found in our annual Infrastructure Funding Statements which are published on the Council's website. The Council also undertakes strategic engagement with key partners—including Hertfordshire County Council, NHS, Sport England, and Highways England as well as local partners such as North Herts College and our businesses to ensure site-specific needs are met, while our Developer Contributions SPD provides clear guidance to guarantee that all obligations are lawful, proportionate, and delivered alongside development.