

# **BALANCING THE BUDGET (BTB) 2026/27 APPENDIX E**

## **Overall Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) of BTB Savings Proposals**

### **Equality at Stevenage Borough Council**

1. Stevenage Borough Council is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion across its services, workforce and local community. To demonstrate its commitment to the identification and mitigation of discrimination and inequality, the Council will complete and publish Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA) when there is a new or revised policy, procedure, function, or where there is a withdrawal of service. For more information about the Council's commitment to advancing equalities please refer to the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy (2022-26).
2. We want to deliver services that are fair, accessible and open to everyone who needs them. Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) are an important part of the process in ensuring that our intention is translated into action. They help to ensure that decisions are made in a fair, transparent and accountable way, considering the needs and the rights of different people in the community.
3. Based on the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, the Equality Impact Assessment considers the impact on the following groups when making decisions, updating policies and starting new projects:
  - Age
  - Disability
  - Gender reassignment
  - Marital status
  - Pregnancy and maternity
  - Race
  - Religion or belief
  - Sex
  - Sexual orientation
4. Although non-statutory, the Council has chosen to adopt the Socio-Economic Duty and Care Experience. Council's elected members and officers are required to consider the impact of their decisions on people who are less fortunate because of their social/economic background.
5. EqIAs also help the Council to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). The Duty states that a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
  - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is unlawful under this Act
  - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

## **Balancing the Budget Proposals 2026/27**

6. Prior to their consideration at Cabinet in October 2025, all savings proposals were reviewed to determine any potential impact on Stevenage residents in terms of their protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Some of these have no direct public impact and so have not been subject to any further EqIA.
7. Where a new change in policy, procedure, function, service or withdrawal of service is proposed, Directors and other appropriate managers have drafted EqIAs.
8. This year there are six new proposals that may potentially have a positive, negative or disproportionate impact. These are:
  - 1) Increasing Discretionary housing payments (DHP)
  - 2) Increasing the Council tax hardship fund
  - 3) Maintaining the allocation of dedicated Enterprise and Skills funding
  - 4) Increasing the financial support Councillors can give through increasing the Local Community Budget
  - 5) Planned improvements to the Gordon Craig Theatre, including new carpets and LED lighting
  - 6) Uplift in pre-application fees across a range of application types
9. The potential impact of these proposals is summarised over the following pages and will inform the recommendations made at Cabinet on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2026. Action to further analyse or mitigate the impact on people with particular protected characteristics is identified where appropriate.
10. It should be noted that EqIA's are working documents and new equality impacts may be identified throughout the planning and implementation stages of the revised policy, procedure, function, service. To ensure that these changes are captured, EqIAs will be updated, and appropriate mitigations considered accordingly.
11. The following further activity will take place:
  - 11<sup>th</sup> February 2026 - Consideration of this document at Cabinet meeting, alongside the budget proposals
  - Ongoing review and update of EQIA's and impact as proposals are further developed and implemented throughout 2026/27, including consultation and engagement as appropriate.

## Summary of Potential Impacts Identified as a Result of Budget Proposals

### Key (Summary Potential Impacts Column)

#	<i>Element</i>	<i>Responsible Officer</i>
1	Increasing Discretionary housing payments (DHP)	Director - Housing & Neighbourhoods (KC)
2	Increasing the Council tax hardship fund	Director - Finance (AI)
3	Maintaining the allocation of dedicated Enterprise and Skills funding	Director - Housing & Neighbourhoods (KC)
4	Increasing the financial support Councillors can give through increasing the Local Community Budget	Director Housing & Neighbourhoods (KC)
5	Planned improvements to the Gordon Craig Theatre, including carpets and LED lighting	Director – Environment & Leisure (SD)
6	Uplift in pre-application fees across a range of application types	Director – Planning & Regulation (AR)

Protected characteristic	Local/National Information	Summary potential impact(s)	Mitigating action(s)
<b>Age</b>	<p>15.5% of Stevenage residents were over 65, compared to significantly higher rates in Hertfordshire (17.4%) and England (18.7%).</p> <p>Stevenage also hosts a slightly younger working population than Hertfordshire and England, with residents aged 16 to 64 years making up 64% of Stevenage's population, compared to 63.6% and 62.9%, respectively.</p> <p>The Office for National Statistics (ONS) report that those in their 40s receive the highest median full-time weekly pay and lowest for younger works aged 16-17 and 18-21. Further, those aged 60+ earn less than the average for all employees.</p> <p><small><a href="#">Average earnings by age and region - House of Commons Library</a></small></p>	<p>1., 2., 4., &amp; 6. ONS report reduced average earnings for younger and older residents across the UK, any increase in fees and charges may have a negative impact on those who are between ages 16-21 and over 60 years old and earn less as a result.</p> <p>However, the increase in the offer available through support schemes such as the Council Tax Hardship Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments will positively impact those who qualify and help enable residents to afford the proposed changes.</p> <p>Further detail on the above is provided in the Socio-Economic Status section.</p> <p>3. The Enterprise and Skills allocation will augment the existing activity in Stevenage, which has largely focused on supporting young people into opportunity, particularly through our work on STEM pathways and construction-related progression. The 2026/27 allocation sustains core delivery capacity and commissions targeted interventions that both deepen that youth-focused offer, through an extension of the partnership with Mission 44, and broaden it by expanding support for adults who are out of work or looking to change careers. Alongside this, it strengthens the Stevenage Works approach by funding additional targeted support for 16 to 18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training.</p>	<p>1., 2., 4., &amp; 6. See socio-economic impacts section below.</p> <p>3. The Enterprise and Skills allocation will have a positive impact of the younger resident population of Stevenage. The Council will offer targeted intervention to increase the opportunities available to young people, as well as expand the support to adults not in employment. Therefore, increasing the support provided through the allocation of this dedicated budget.</p>

Protected characteristic	Local/National Information	Summary potential impact(s)	Mitigating action(s)
		<p>5. The proposed budget has allocated significant funds to provide improvements to the Gordan Craig Theatre, including the installation of new carpets and LED lighting. These will help the theatre to continue to provide vital engagement for all ages.</p>	<p>5. The proposed improvements to the theatre will follow the existing commitments made to accessibility to all with dedicated wheelchair accessible viewing areas, blue badge parking, and accommodations available for visitors who are hearing or visually impaired. These considerations will continue as improvements are made and access will be ensured for all ages.</p>
<b>Disability</b>	<p>According to the 2021 Census, 17.3% of Stevenage residents had a disability covered under the Equality Act that limited their day-to-day activities, compared to 14.4% in Hertfordshire and 17.3% in England.</p> <p>The Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that in the UK in 2023, the pay gap between disabled and non-disabled employees was 12.7%, with a median hourly pay of £15.69 for non-disabled employees and £13.69 for disabled employees;</p>	<p>1., 2., 4., &amp; 6. Due to the prevalence of a national disability pay gap, any increase in fees and charges may have a negative impact on those who have a disability and earn less as a result.</p> <p>However, the increase in the offer available through support schemes such as the Council Tax Hardship Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments will positively impact those who qualify and help enable residents to afford the proposed changes.</p> <p>Further detail on the above is provided in the Socio-Economic Status section.</p> <p>5. The proposed budget has allocated significant funds to provide improvements to the Gordan Craig</p>	<p>1., 2., 4., &amp; 6. See socio-economic impacts section below.</p> <p>5. The proposed improvements to the theatre will follow the existing</p>

<b>Protected characteristic</b>	<b>Local/National Information</b>	<b>Summary potential impact(s)</b>	<b>Mitigating action(s)</b>
	<p>this pay gap has remained relatively stable since 2014.</p> <p>In April 2025, there were 5,385 Personal Independent Payment (PIP) claimants in Stevenage, which is a 13.58% increase from 4,741 in April 2024.</p>	<p>Theatre, including the installation of new carpets and LED lighting.</p> <p>Accessibility requirements will be considered during the carpet fitting process and upon their unveiling. Further, individuals with neurodiverse needs often have heightened sensitivity to light and the installation of new LED lighting may cause a negative impact on those attending the theatre. However, soft LEDS are often offered as preferred solutions for neurodiverse needs and therefore this has been considered as part of these improvements.</p>	<p>commitments made to accessibility to all with dedicated wheelchair accessible viewing areas, blue badge parking, and accommodations available for visitors who are hearing or visually impaired. These considerations will continue as improvements are made and access will be ensured for all disabled visitors.</p> <p>Alternate requirements for neurodiverse needs will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis but this has been considered as part of these improvements.</p>
<b>Gender reassignment</b>	0.4% of residents have a different gender identity to the sex registered at birth, compared to 0.41% in Hertfordshire and 0.44% in England	No differential impacts directly related to people having this characteristic have been identified as a result of these proposals.	
<b>Marital status</b>	The majority of Stevenage residents (43.9%) were married or in a registered civil partnership. In comparison, 48.4% of residents are married or in a registered civil partnership in Hertfordshire and 44.7% in England.	No differential impacts directly related to people having this characteristic have been identified as a result of these proposals.	

Protected characteristic	Local/National Information	Summary potential impact(s)	Mitigating action(s)
<b>Pregnancy and maternity</b>	The birth rate in Stevenage in 2024 sat at 12.2 live births per 1,000 people, which is higher than 10.9 in Hertfordshire and 10.5 in England.	No differential impacts directly related to people having this characteristic have been identified as a result of these proposals.	
<b>Race</b>	<p>24.7% of Stevenage residents were from an ethnic minority (non-White British) in 2021, compared to 16.9% in the 2011 Census. In comparison, 28.2% of residents in Hertfordshire and 26.5% in England overall are from an ethnic minority group.</p> <p>In 2022, Office of National Statistics (ONS) figures showed that in the UK in 2022 Black, African, Caribbean or Black British employees earned less (£13.53) median gross hourly pay than White employees (£14.35), which has been consistent since 2012.</p>	<p>1., 2., 4., &amp; 6. Due to the prevalence of a national ethnicity pay gap, any increase in fees and charges may have a negative impact on those from an ethnic minority and earn less as a result.</p> <p>However, the increase in the offer available through support schemes such as the Council Tax Hardship Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments will positively impact those who qualify and help enable residents to afford the proposed changes.</p> <p>Further detail on the above is provided in the Socio-Economic Status section.</p>	1., 2., 4., & 6. See socio-economic impacts section below.
<b>Religion or belief</b>	44.9% of Stevenage residents identify with no specified religion, which is significantly higher than	No differential impacts directly related to people having this characteristic have been identified as a result of these proposals.	

Protected characteristic	Local/National Information	Summary potential impact(s)	Mitigating action(s)
	Hertfordshire and England levels (36.6% and 33.7%).		
<b>Sex</b>	<p>50.6% of Stevenage residents were female and 49.4% were male in mid-2023 ONS estimates.</p> <p>In April 2025, the UK's gender pay gap stood at 6.9%, down from 7.1% in April 2024.</p> <p>In 2021, the UK's gender pay gap rose from 14.9% to 15.4% (Office for National Statistics, ONS, 2021). This means that, on average, women earn just over 15% less than men per hour.</p>	<p>1., 2., 4., &amp; 6. Due to the prevalence of a national gender pay gap, any increase in fees and charges may have a negative impact on those who are female and earn less as a result. However, the increase in the offer available through support schemes such as the Council Tax Hardship Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments will positively impact those who qualify and help enable residents to afford the proposed changes.</p> <p>Further detail on the above is provided in the Socio-Economic Status section.</p>	1., 2., 4., & 6. See socio-economic impacts section below.
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	2.7% of residents identify with LGBTQ+ sexual orientations, which is higher than Hertfordshire's average of 2.3% but lower than the national average of 3.17% in England.	No differential impacts directly related to people having this characteristic have been identified as a result of these proposals.	
<b>Socio-economic</b>	According to the 2025 English Index of Multiple Deprivation, Stevenage continues to be the	1. The Council uses Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to support residents short term to stay in their homes, with awards in 2024/25 reflecting pressure on	Fee increases and charges are reviewed annually by the Council to

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	<p>most deprived authority in Hertfordshire. Of this, Bedwell is the most deprived ward in Town.</p> <p>In May 2025, 8,982 households were in receipt of Universal Credit in Stevenage, a 17.18% increase from 7,665 households in May 2024.</p> <p>This significant increase is a result of the migration from benefits such as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Housing Benefit.</p> <p>In April 2025, there were 5,385 Personal Independent Payment (PIP) claimants in Stevenage, which is a 13.58% increase from 4,741 in April 2024.</p> <p>In July 2025, the number of Council Tax Support recipients of working age (non-pensioners) was 3,284, which is a 1.92% increase from 3,222 in July</p>	<p>households affected by the spare room subsidy restriction, and those in receipt of universal credit. There are always more requests than funding and an additional £99K is recommended for 2026/27 to help support this demand.</p> <p>2. The Exceptional Hardship Relief scheme offered by the Council has seen an uptake since the pandemic and during the ongoing difficult economic climate. There is an application process requiring financial information and supporting evidence and each case is reviewed independently and against the Exceptional Hardship Relief policy. Any award will be used to reduce council tax liabilities for those found to be in exceptional hardship and to help them improve their financial situation. SBC has a residual amount of circa £170K remaining and it is recommended that this is increased by £90K to provide greater levels of support for those with lower socio-economic status.</p> <p>This has also been considered in light of the previously announced uplift in council tax for 2026/27, further information mitigating the impact of the proposed increases can be seen in the dedicated EqIA for Council Tax Increase.</p> <p>4. The increase in Local Community Budget (LCB) also enables the financial support Councillors can give to increase and therefore support residents even more in the next financial year.</p>	<p>ensure that the cost of providing the service is met.</p> <p>To help mitigate the increase in Planning Fees, the Council does offer a free enquiry service to ensure a person is provided the advice they need prior to making an application.</p> <p>To help mitigate any negative impacts on residents the Council is able to offer concessions to those who are eligible. Eligibility is dependent on the service but typically will include residents in receipt of a means tested benefit. Please see the Council's Concessionary Policy for further information on the Council's approach to setting concessions.</p> <p>To help mitigate any negative impacts on residents the Council will continue to offer financial assistance through multiple support schemes and activities, including</p>

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	2024.	6. The budget proposed uplifting pre-application fees across a range of application types. Customers who use the pre-application service will be affected by fee increases, especially those who have a lower socio-economic status. More information can be found in the 2026/27 Fees and Charges report to the October Cabinet Appendix A concerning the fees and charges.	both DHP and the Council tax hardship fund.

## **Additional EqlAs**

A series of additional, more specific EqlAs have been referenced throughout this overarching Budget EqlA, these are available upon request.

1. Council Tax Increase EqlA
2. Fees & Charges (General Fund) EqlA
3. Fees & Charges (HRA) EqlA