

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 17 March 2026

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Jim Brown (Chair), Andy McGuinness (Vice-Chair), Philip Bibby, Stephen Booth, Robert Boyle, Leanne Brady, Kamal Choudhury, Peter Clark, Akin Elekolusi, Alistair Gordon and Ellie Plater

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 6.55pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sandra Barr, Lynda Guy and Ceara Roopchand.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 17 February 2026 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - STEVENAGE BIODIVERSITY DUTY MONITORING

The Director of Planning updated the Committee with the Council's first Biodiversity Duty Report. Members were informed that the report outlined how Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) had been monitored across the town, alongside the actions and strategies in place to enhance the local environment.

It was noted that Cabinet had expressed support for initiatives such as the Climate Change Community Fund and the work of the Green Space volunteers.

Observations were made regarding the limitations of using habitats as a proxy for biodiversity. It was suggested that while habitats may exist, this did not necessarily indicate that they were healthy or supporting species. Questions were raised about gaps in biodiversity data and the need for more comprehensive monitoring. Officers acknowledged that biodiversity monitoring was a relatively new legal requirement and that the current level of data required further development.

Members also considered the financial implications of biodiversity monitoring. It was explained that, in relation to BNG, monitoring costs associated with development would typically be secured through the planning process and funded by developers.

It was noted that the priority would be to avoid any negative impacts on biodiversity

and the need for offsetting elsewhere. Questions were raised about biodiversity offsetting occurring outside of Hertfordshire. Officers advised that, where local habitat banks were unavailable, developers may need to secure biodiversity gains elsewhere, though efforts would be made to identify more local opportunities, including collaboration with neighbouring authorities.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

4 PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - CORPORATE PERFORMANCE - QUARTER 3 2025/26

The Committee considered the Corporate Performance Report for Quarter 3. It was noted that the Regulator of Social Housing compliance measures had been maintained at 100%, and progress was also highlighted on the Brent Court Independent Living Scheme, alongside the forthcoming demolition works as part of the regeneration of the Oval.

However, it was acknowledged by the Portfolio Holder for Housing that further work was required to address the void rates. The introduction of the new food waste collection service was also noted, and thanks were extended to officers for their work in delivering this.

During discussion, a question was raised regarding the impact of the relocation of the indoor market, and Members questioned whether further clarification could be provided on the effect of the move on stallholders and overall footfall. In response, officers advised that a briefing note would be provided to Members, including footfall data.

Officers further noted that while there were some vacant units, a number were in the process of being let, with additional traders expected to join in the coming months. Officers further confirmed that engagement with traders was ongoing to understand feedback and support the transition to the new market.

Questions were raised in relation to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the future monitoring of performance. Officers explained that this would be decided by the new unitary authority, as it would be responsible for determining how performance was reported in the future. Members noted this and highlighted the importance of encouraging reporting that still allowed for local comparisons.

The Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

5 PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - QUARTER 3 BUDGET MONITORING

The Committee considered the Quarter 3 Budget Monitoring report. It was reported that Cabinet had reviewed the position for the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and Capital Programme.

It was noted that there was a projected overspend of £68,000 for the General Fund, while the HRA was forecasting an underspend of £1.2 million, largely due to

additional grant funding and interest income from increased cash flow linked to Right to Buy receipts.

Members raised questions regarding the potential financial risks, particularly in relation to energy price volatility. In response, Officers explained that energy costs had largely been secured in advance, with prices fixed until the end of the financial year, although some risk remained for unpurchased supply. It was confirmed that this risk would continue to be monitored.

A further question was raised regarding the status of the Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) fuel-related contract, and whether cost inflation could arise from this. Officers confirmed that the current contract had been extended and that procurement for a new contract would take place in the coming months. It was acknowledged that market conditions were challenging, particularly in relation to pricing, although supply was not currently considered a significant risk. It was noted that the price of HVO was moving in line with conventional diesel during the current crisis.

6 PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - REVOCATION AND VARIATION OF TAXI RANKS TO THE HIGH STREET, STEVENAGE

The Committee considered the report seeking the revocation of the existing taxi rank on the High Street. This was to support works being undertaken by the County Council as part of the Active Travel Fund.

The report outlined a number of associated changes, including arrangements for alternative ranks, timings, and the use of ranks for parking.

Members were informed that parking restrictions for the retained northbound rank would mirror existing High Street arrangements, with a maximum stay of two hours and no return within three hours, operating between 7:00am and 6:30pm, after which the taxi rank would be in use.

A further question was raised regarding the temporary taxi rank outside Tesco and whether it would be regulated. Officers advised that this would be a temporary arrangement put in place during the works, and further details would be provided to the Committee.

Questions were raised regarding additional signage, and it was noted that this would be installed to clearly communicate when parking was permitted on taxi ranks.

7 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2025-26

The Committee considered the development of the current and future Overview and Scrutiny work programme. Members acknowledged the importance of avoiding a situation where an incoming committee would be constrained by a pre-determined programme, whilst also recognising the need to allow officers sufficient time to prepare forthcoming work.

The Committee was informed that Members had previously been invited to submit suggestions for the work programme, and initial feedback had been received.

Discussions took place regarding LGR, and members agreed that this would need to form a key component of the future work programme, although it was acknowledged that the scope and detail of scrutiny activity would depend on the outcome of national decisions. Officers advised that, at this stage, the Council was in a holding position pending further clarity, but that future scrutiny could examine readiness for transition and the development of any formal transition plans.

It was further noted that the future shadow authority would have a formal role in overseeing organisational design and implementation.

Members noted that previously considered topics, such as corporate communications, workforce and Member complaints, would not require a new scrutiny review at this stage, but would instead be monitored through existing reporting mechanisms.

It was confirmed that the action tracker would be brought back to the Committee in July to ensure that previous recommendations and actions were not lost.

The Committee agreed that cyber security should remain an area of focus for future scrutiny.

In addition, the scope of the proposed review on social value and ethical investment was broadened to include consideration of how social value is delivered through procurement processes and contract management, including the extent to which social value commitments made in tenders are realised in practice.

Members also noted that certain statutory and recurring items, including the General Fund Budget, Council Tax setting, and Housing Rents, would continue to form part of the work programme.

In terms Council Tax Support, it was suggested that, depending on the progress of local government reorganisation, it may not be appropriate to undertake a full review of the scheme for a single year if significant structural changes were imminent.

The Committee concluded that, while a number of key themes had been identified, further input from Members was required to finalise the work programme. Members were invited to submit any additional suggestions or comments by the agreed deadline of 26 March 2026, after which the programme would be reviewed and reported back.

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

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

9 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

10 **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.

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

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 17 February 2026 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12 **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.

13 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR