

Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Stronger Communities & Equalities
Date 15/07/26



ST NICHOLAS PRIDE IN PLACE FUNDING: BOARD ESTABLISHMENT AND PLAN DEVELOPMENT

KEY DECISION

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The St Nicholas area of Stevenage has been awarded Pride in Place funding, providing access to up to £20 million over 10 years to support a resident-led programme of investment in the neighbourhood.
- 1.2 This report provides an overview of the funding awarded, the role of Stevenage Borough Council as the initial accountable body, and the proposed approach to establishing the St Nicholas Pride in Place Neighbourhood Board.
- 1.3 The report also sets out the proposed approach to Board recruitment, confirmation of the programme geography, early community engagement and development of the St Nicholas Pride in Place Plan for submission to government by February 2027.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet notes the award of Pride in Place funding to the St Nicholas area and the role of Stevenage Borough Council as the initial accountable body for the programme.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approves the proposed approach to establishing the St Nicholas Pride in Place Neighbourhood Board to support the initial stages of the programme.
- 2.3 That delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director (JB), having consulted with the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities & Equalities, to develop the St Nicholas Pride in Place Plan for submission to government by February 2027.
- 2.4 That Cabinet agrees that a further report will be brought forward ahead of the February 2027 submission deadline, setting out the St Nicholas Pride in Place Plan.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Pride in Place Programme is a national programme led by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). It is designed to support long-term, resident-led investment in selected communities, with a focus on strengthening local pride, improving neighbourhood conditions and empowering local people to shape priorities for their area.
- 3.2 The first phase of the programme built on the previous Long-Term Plan for Towns approach and provided funding to 75 towns across the UK. The second phase changed the focus of the programme from larger town-based areas to smaller neighbourhood geographies, with places in England selected using Middle Layer Super Output Areas as the default geography.
- 3.3 In March 2026, government confirmed a further expansion of Phase 2, including St Nicholas in Stevenage. This places St Nicholas within the neighbourhood-based phase of the programme, rather than the earlier town-based model, and provides access to up to £20 million over 10 years to support a locally developed programme of investment.
- 3.4 The government's selection methodology for the Phase 2 expansion focused on identifying neighbourhoods with high levels of need. In England, this was based on three headline data sources:
 - 3.4.1 **Index of Multiple Deprivation:** the government's official measure of relative deprivation in England, bringing together factors including income, employment, education, health, crime, barriers to housing and services, and living environment.
 - 3.4.2 **Community Needs Index:** a measure designed to identify places where social infrastructure and community capacity may be weaker, including issues such as access to services, community assets, participation and civic strength.
 - 3.4.3 **Community Life Survey:** a national survey used to understand community cohesion, belonging, volunteering, loneliness and civic

participation. For the Phase 2 expansion, this was used as a community cohesion filter alongside the measures of deprivation and community need.

- 3.5 Stevenage Borough Council has received £252,604 of capacity funding from MHCLG to support the establishment of the programme ahead of the submission of the St Nicholas Pride in Place Plan. This funding is intended to support activity such as Board establishment, early community engagement, development of the local evidence base, programme management and preparation of the Plan.
- 3.6 Following submission and approval of the Pride in Place Plan, the programme is expected to move into delivery funding, with up to £2 million available each year over the 10-year programme. The funding profile for Phase 2 areas is split between capital and revenue funding, with 63% allocated as capital and 37% allocated as revenue.
- 3.7 The funding will be paid to Stevenage Borough Council in its role as accountable body, with local priorities and investment activity to be shaped through the St Nicholas Pride in Place Neighbourhood Board and wider community engagement. The Council will support this process and ensure that funding is managed in line with relevant legal, financial and governance requirements.
- 3.8 The national programme is framed around three overarching aims. These aims are reflected in the breadth of interventions available through the programme:
 - 3.8.1 **Stronger communities**, including activity that supports community cohesion, volunteering, social action, local events, community leadership, neighbourhood safety, health and wellbeing, and stronger relationships between residents and local organisations.
 - 3.8.2 **Thriving places**, including investment in public realm, parks and green spaces, local centres, community buildings, youth facilities, heritage, arts and culture, active travel, local services and other physical improvements to the neighbourhood.
 - 3.8.3 **Taking back control**, including activity that gives residents a greater role in shaping local priorities, supports community-led decision making, improves access to opportunity, and helps local people influence the future of their area.
- 3.9 Despite these three aims, the prospectus and supporting guidance make clear that the programme is intended to give Neighbourhood Boards flexibility to respond to local evidence and resident priorities.
- 3.10 Indicative interventions include public realm and high street improvements, parks and community gardens, refurbishment of community and youth facilities, local arts and heritage activity, support for economically inactive residents, tailored skills provision, community cohesion activity, participatory engagement, social action, community-level health provision, active travel, crime prevention and school-based programmes for children and young people.

- 3.11 Examples from other Pride in Place areas show the breadth of activity that Neighbourhood Boards may consider, depending on local evidence and resident priorities:
- 3.10.1 **Canvey Island** in Castle Point has developed a broad plan covering Canvey Lake, parks and playgrounds, the seafront and town centre, alongside youth activity, skills and community facilities. It demonstrates how environmental, community and economic priorities can be brought together within a single place-based plan.
 - 3.10.2 **Newton-le-Willows** in St Helens has combined early projects, including playground investment, improvements at Earlestown Town Hall and library-based wellbeing activity, with longer-term town centre building improvements. It shows how visible early action can sit alongside preparation for future investment in community and heritage assets.
 - 3.10.3 **Spennymoor** in County Durham has developed a resident-shaped programme linking business support, street safety and active travel with a children and young people's fund. It demonstrates how locally led investment can support physical improvements alongside opportunity for residents.
 - 3.10.4 **Greenock** in Inverclyde has developed a regeneration plan to reconnect the town centre and waterfront, alongside a proposed Enterprise Hub, heritage-led renewal and work to strengthen local identity. It illustrates how a programme can combine physical regeneration with enterprise and a longer-term place narrative.

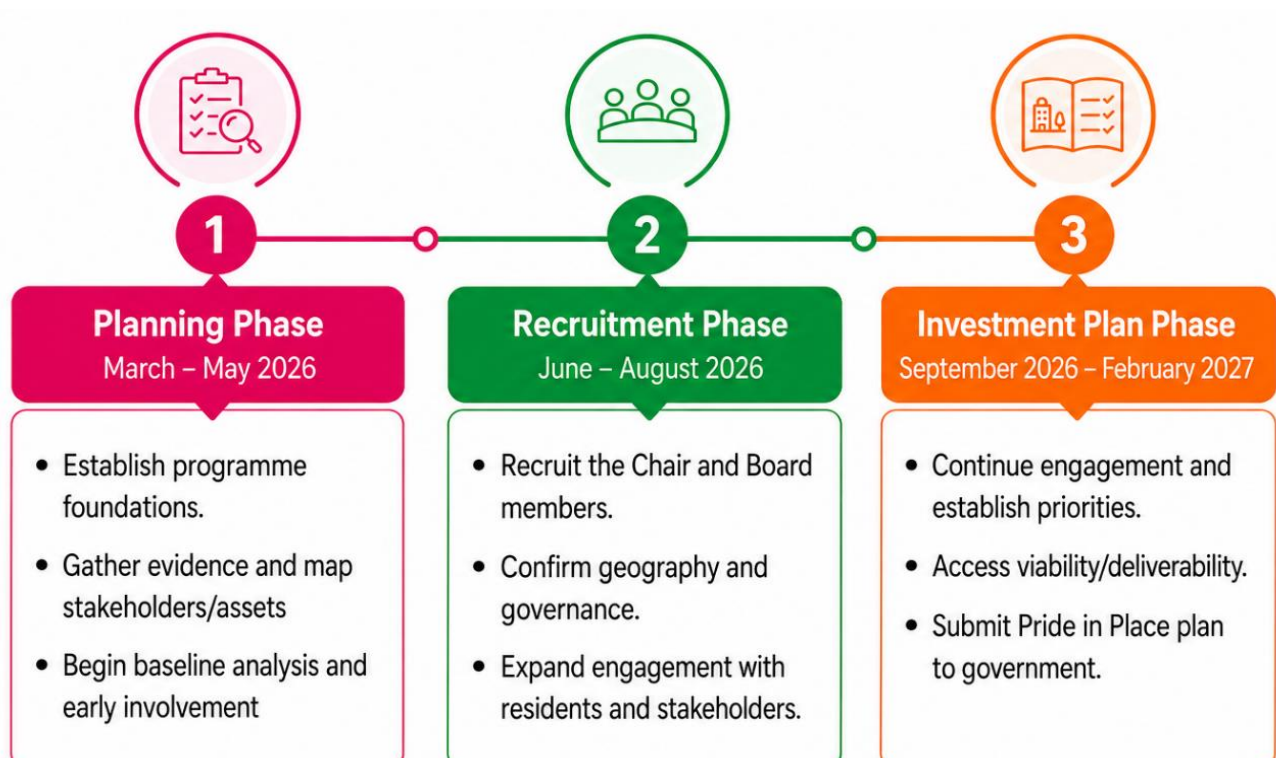
4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 The immediate focus for the programme is to establish the St Nicholas Pride in Place Neighbourhood Board, confirm the programme geography, and begin the evidence gathering, engagement and planning work required ahead of submission.
- 4.2 Pride in Place is intended to be resident-led, with local priorities shaped through the Neighbourhood Board and wider community engagement. Stevenage Borough Council's role as the initial accountable body is to support the establishment of the Board, provide appropriate governance and financial oversight, and ensure that the programme is developed in line with national guidance.
- 4.3 A joint working group involving relevant Stevenage Borough Council members and officers, alongside representatives from the local Member of Parliament's office, has been established to support the early establishment of the programme. It is focused on Chair recruitment, Board membership, governance arrangements, communications and engagement. Its work is guided by the following principles:

- 4.3.1 **Working together as the core principle:** The shared starting point is that the Council and the MP's office are working together to support the best possible outcome for St Nicholas.
- 4.3.2 **Community-first approach:** Activity should be framed around what is right for the community, with decisions shaped by resident voice, local evidence and the emerging role of the Board.
- 4.3.3 **Co-production and openness:** The approach should be open, transparent and co-produced wherever possible, with issues surfaced early and worked through collaboratively.
- 4.3.4 **Aligning activity for shared impact:** Pride in Place should align with ongoing activity across St Nicholas and across partners, so that it both builds on, and adds momentum to, wider work already underway.
- 4.3.5 **Joint communications planning:** Communications should be developed and agreed jointly, with the comms side linked into the key working group so messaging is aligned from the outset.
- 4.3.6 **Small working nucleus:** A core working group between the Council and the MP's office can help keep momentum, manage issues and prepare clear steps for the Leader of the Council, the MP and the future Board.
- 4.3.7 **Decision support for local leadership and the Board:** The purpose of officer work in this phase is to support informed decision-making by the Council, the MP and, once established, the Board.

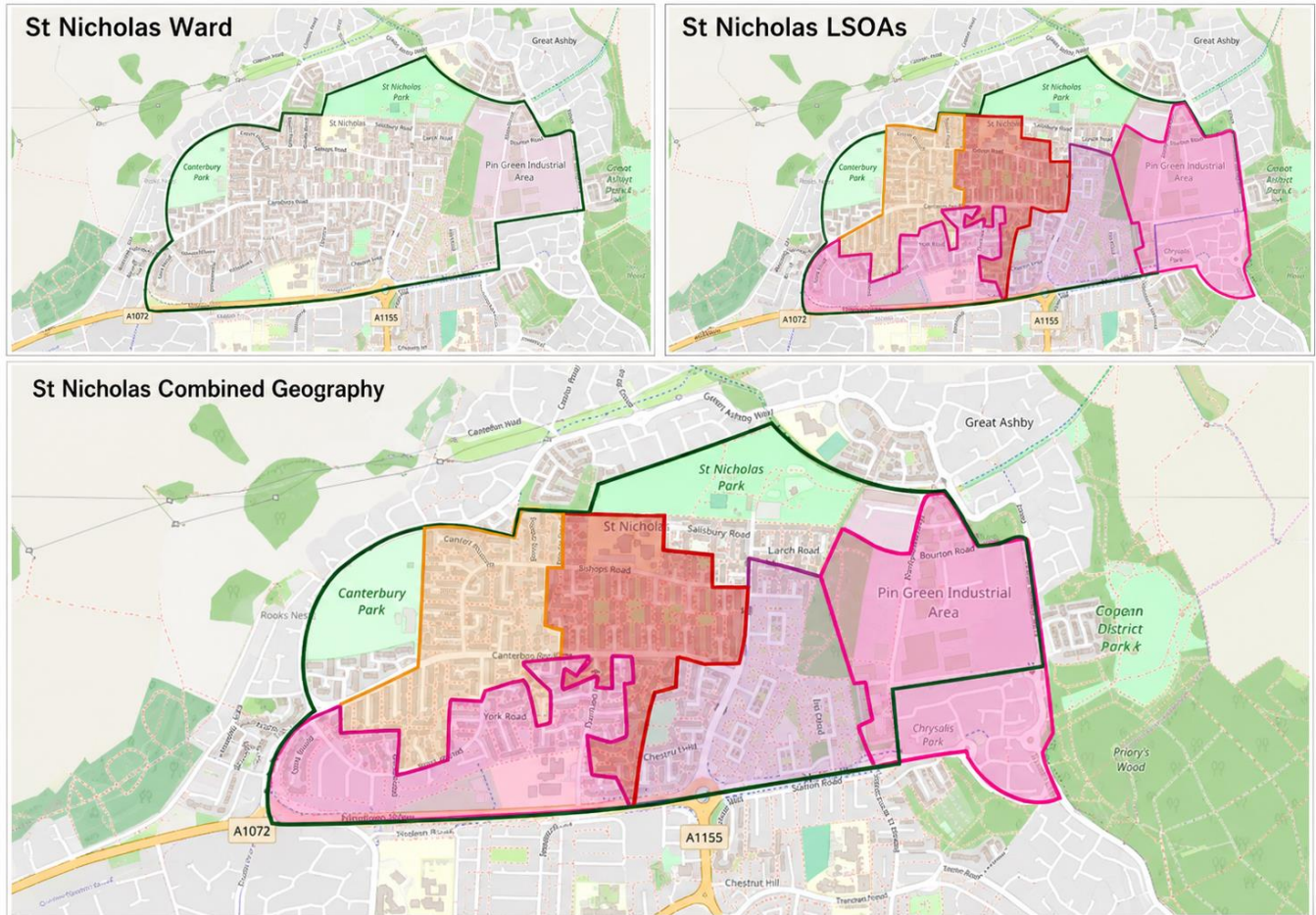
Programme Timeline

- 4.4 The programme can be organised across three broad stages, moving from early evidence and planning, into governance and engagement, and then into investment plan development.



Programme Geography

- 4.5 The default programme geography for Pride in Place is the St Nicholas Middle Layer Super Output Area (MSOA), rather than the St Nicholas Ward. MSOAs are statistical geographies used to present local data, while Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are smaller statistical areas that sit beneath them. The St Nicholas MSOA, also known as Stevenage 001, is made up of five LSOAs: Stevenage 001A, 001B, 001D, 001E and 001F.



- 4.6 The national guidance allows Phase 2 Neighbourhood Boards to make representations to alter the default geography, within the parameters set by government. For St Nicholas, the Council will work with the Chair, Board, local Member of Parliament, ward councillors and residents to consider the most appropriate geography for the programme. This will need to be confirmed alongside Chair and Board membership by 28 August 2026.
- 4.7 Government guidance is clear that an agreed geography must be established for the programme. However, St Nicholas is not an island and residents do not necessarily organise their lives around administrative boundaries on a map. The Board will therefore need to understand the neighbourhood as a lived place, while still ensuring that investment remains focused on the residents and communities the programme is intended to support.
- 4.8 A practical example of this is secondary education. There are no secondary schools within the St Nicholas Ward. If the Board wished to consider school-

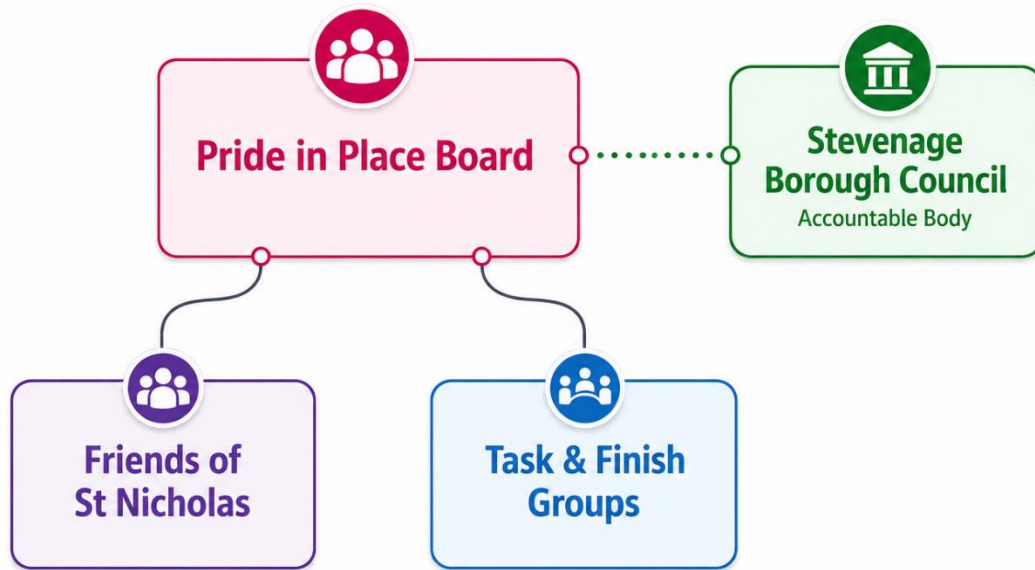
based activity in future, this would likely need to involve secondary schools serving St Nicholas residents, while focusing activity on pupils who live within the Pride in Place area.

- 4.9 The initial proposal to the Board will be to use a combined St Nicholas MSOA and St Nicholas Ward footprint as the baseline for confirming the programme geography. This would provide a clear starting point, while allowing the Board to consider how adjoining neighbourhoods and nearby assets relate to residents' everyday lives.

Establishing the Neighbourhood Board

- 4.10 The establishment of the St Nicholas Pride in Place Neighbourhood Board is the central requirement for the early phase of the programme. The Board will lead the development of the Pride in Place Plan, supported by the Council, local residents, community groups, businesses, the local Member of Parliament and other partners.
- 4.11 National guidance requires the Board to have at least eight members, with at least 51% living or working within the neighbourhood, and to include the local Member of Parliament and at least one ward councillor. Membership should broadly reflect the diversity of the local area.
- 4.12 Recruitment for the independent Chair has commenced ahead of this report being presented to Cabinet, to support the Board being in place by 28 August 2026. Recruitment to the Chair, Vice Chair and Board member roles will follow a clear and accessible process, supported by the Council and informed by learning from other Pride in Place areas. The Chair cannot be an elected representative and will be appointed through a process informed by discussion with the local Member of Parliament.
- 4.13 Draft governance documents have been prepared to support the establishment of the Board, including proposed Terms of Reference, declarations of interest arrangements, decision-making processes and secretariat support. These will be refined with the Chair and Board following appointment, before being formally agreed.
- 4.13.1 The Terms of Reference will set out the Board's role, composition and terms of office, alongside arrangements for rotation and succession. They will reflect the working principles set out above and establish expected behaviours, inclusive participation, transparency and the management of conflicts of interest.
- 4.13.2 They will also provide the framework for preparing the Pride in Place Plan, setting out how resident insight, local evidence and appropriate financial, legal and delivery assurance will inform Board decisions.
- 4.13.3 The proposed model places the Pride in Place Board as the lead decision-making body, with Stevenage Borough Council acting as accountable body. A wider Friends of St Nicholas group will support involvement and engagement, while Task and Finish Groups will help progress specific priorities. Board development,

community capacity, performance monitoring and impact evaluation will be built into the programme as it develops.



- 4.14 The national programme sets an ambition for areas to move towards more community-led delivery models over time. Any future change to accountable body arrangements would need to be considered carefully and only when the Board has the governance, capacity, resources and systems required to manage programme delivery independently.

Evidence Gathering, Engagement & Communications

- 4.15 A strong local evidence base will be essential to support the Board's early work. The Board will need to consider statistical data, local assets, resident experience, stakeholder insight and existing service or investment activity in and around St Nicholas.
- 4.16 It is proposed that capacity funding is used to commission an externally delivered, representative resident survey for St Nicholas. This would provide robust insight into resident priorities, perceptions and lived experience, helping the Board to make informed decisions when developing the Pride in Place Plan.
- 4.17 This work needs to begin before the Board is fully established. If the Council waited until the Board was in place before commissioning the survey, it is unlikely that the evidence would be available early enough to properly inform the development of the Plan ahead of the February 2027 submission deadline.
- 4.18 Engagement with residents, community groups, businesses, ward councillors, the local Member of Parliament and other local stakeholders will continue throughout the development of the Plan. This will include digital and in-person activity, alongside targeted work with residents who may be less likely to respond to general consultation. The approach will be designed to be inclusive and accessible, recognising barriers relating to disability, language, digital exclusion, age, cost, caring responsibilities and confidence to participate.

- 4.19 A joint communications and engagement approach will be important to ensure that residents understand the programme, the role of the Board and the opportunities to shape the Plan. This should include clear communication on what has been heard, how views have been considered and how the Board is developing its priorities.

Capacity Funding

- 4.20 Stevenage Borough Council has received £252,604 of capacity funding from the MHCLG to support the early establishment of the programme. This funding is intended to provide the practical capacity needed to establish the Board, support engagement and develop the Pride in Place Plan ahead of the first delivery funding being made available.

Funding Type	Amount
Capital	£117,604
Revenue	£135,000
Total	£252,604

- 4.21 It is proposed that this funding is used to support the following areas of activity:
- 4.21.1 **Resident survey, evidence gathering and baseline analysis:** commissioning a representative resident survey for St Nicholas. This will sit alongside local data analysis, asset mapping and work to understand relevant service, community and investment activity in and around the area.
- 4.21.2 **Officer capacity and Board support and development:** securing dedicated officer capacity for Chair and Board recruitment, Board administration, governance, meetings, resident engagement and Plan development. This will include induction and access to advice for the Chair and Board.
- 4.21.3 **Communications, engagement and community capacity activity:** supporting accessible communications and physical and digital engagement. This will include targeted work with residents less likely to engage through general consultation, alongside support for residents and local organisations to help develop, deliver and monitor the programme.
- 4.22 Using capacity funding before the Board is fully established is recommended because there are a number of practical steps that need to be progressed ahead of the main plan development period. Waiting until the Board is in place would create a significant delivery gap and would risk the Board not having the evidence, officer support and engagement infrastructure required to meet the February 2027 submission deadline.

Other Options Considered

- 4.23 A number of alternative options have been considered. As a default principle, decisions on the use of Pride in Place funding should be shaped through the Chair and Neighbourhood Board wherever possible. However, there are several practical steps that need to be progressed before the Board is fully established to ensure that the programme can meet the February 2027 submission deadline. The following points summarise the key decision areas linked to the recommendations in this report.
- 4.24 **Evidence and capacity:** delaying resident survey work, evidence gathering and officer capacity until after the Board is fully established is not recommended. The Chair and Board will need a robust evidence base to inform their early decision making, and the timetable requires this work to begin before the Board is fully in place. Without this, there is a significant risk that the Board would not have the resident insight, baseline data and officer support required during the main plan development period.
- 4.25 **Project development:** developing a more detailed set of proposed projects before the Board is established is not recommended. This would not reflect the resident-led principles of the programme and could undermine the role of the Neighbourhood Board in shaping local priorities.
- 4.26 **Geography:** interpreting the programme geography narrowly and focusing only on activity within strict administrative boundaries is not recommended. The Board will need to maintain a clear focus on St Nicholas residents, while also recognising the wider geography of everyday life and the role of nearby assets used by the community.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no additional direct financial implications for the Council arising from the recommendations in this report, beyond its role as the initial accountable body for the Pride in Place funding.
- 5.2 The Council has received capacity funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to support the early establishment of the St Nicholas Pride in Place programme. The funding breakdown is set out in section 4 of this report.
- 5.3 The use of capacity funding is expected to include dedicated officer support for the programme. However, the Council's accountable body role will also require input from existing services, including finance, legal, procurement, communications, community development, policy and relevant delivery teams. This officer time will be managed within existing resources at this stage, with any future resource implications kept under review as the programme develops.
- 5.4 The wider programme provides access to up to £20 million over 10 years, subject to the submission and approval of the St Nicholas Pride in Place

Plan. Future delivery funding will be dependent on government approval of the Plan and will be subject to the funding conditions and requirements set by MHCLG.

- 5.5 Any future Council funding requirements, match funding, project-specific financial commitments, or financial risks arising from the Pride in Place Plan will be considered as part of future reports and decision-making processes.

Legal Implications

- 5.6 As the initial accountable body, the Council will be responsible for ensuring that Pride in Place funding is managed in accordance with the relevant grant conditions, legal requirements and internal governance arrangements.
- 5.7 Legal advice will be sought as required in relation to the governance of the Neighbourhood Board, the use of capacity funding, procurement activity, data protection requirements linked to resident engagement and survey work, and any agreements needed with delivery partners or commissioned providers.
- 5.8 The Neighbourhood Board will have an important role in shaping local priorities and the Pride in Place Plan. However, while the Council remains the accountable body, decisions and expenditure will need to be managed through appropriate legal, financial and governance processes.
- 5.9 Any future proposal to move towards a different accountable body arrangement would require further consideration, including legal, financial, governance and capacity implications, and would be subject to further advice and decision making at the appropriate time.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Implications

- 5.10 The Pride in Place programme is expected to run over 10 years and will therefore extend beyond the current anticipated timeline for Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire. With vesting day currently anticipated for 1 April 2028, the programme, its governance arrangements and any accountable body responsibilities will need to be considered as part of transition planning.
- 5.11 Government guidance sets an expectation that Neighbourhood Boards may mature over time into more independent community-led bodies capable of managing funding directly. However, there is no guarantee that the St Nicholas Pride in Place Neighbourhood Board will have reached this stage ahead of vesting day.
- 5.12 Should the Council remain as the accountable body at the point of vesting, arrangements will need to be made for the transfer of accountable body responsibilities to the successor authority. This will need to include grant management, financial monitoring, governance records, Board support, risk management, legal agreements, procurement records and project documentation linked to the Pride in Place Plan.

Risk Implications

- 5.13 There are risks associated with the programme timetable, particularly the requirement to establish the Board, confirm the programme geography and develop the Pride in Place Plan for submission by February 2027. This is

being mitigated through early programme planning, the establishment of a working group with the local Member of Parliament's team, early Chair recruitment, and use of capacity funding to support evidence gathering and engagement.

- 5.14 There is a risk that the Board is unable to agree priorities, develop investable proposals or commit spend in line with the annual funding profile for the programme. As the programme is expected to operate on a cadence of up to £2 million per year, delays in agreeing priorities or progressing delivery could create a risk of future funding being paused, suspended or re-profiled by government. This will be mitigated through early evidence gathering, clear governance arrangements, officer support and a structured plan development process ahead of the February 2027 submission deadline.
- 5.15 There is a risk that resident expectations may develop ahead of the Board agreeing priorities and before government approval of the Pride in Place Plan. There is also a risk that the programme geography may not be easily understood by residents, particularly because the default MSOA geography does not directly match the St Nicholas Ward. These risks will be mitigated through clear mapping, accessible communications, careful engagement and a feedback loop that explains how resident views are being used to inform the Board's work.
- 5.16 There are accountable body risks linked to the management of public funding, including compliance with grant conditions, procurement requirements, financial controls and delivery oversight. These will be mitigated through the Council's established governance, finance, legal, procurement and risk management arrangements, supported by clear Board governance processes.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.17 Pride in Place funding has been awarded to St Nicholas in recognition of local need, with the national programme designed to support communities experiencing higher levels of deprivation, lower levels of community infrastructure and weaker indicators of local pride and cohesion.
- 5.18 The programme is expected to have positive equalities impacts by focusing investment, engagement and community-led planning in an area with identified need. Care will be needed to ensure that engagement reaches a broad range of residents, including people who may be less likely to respond to general consultation activity.
- 5.19 An Equalities Impact Assessment is attached at Appendix A. This will support the establishment of the Board, the approach to engagement and the development of the St Nicholas Pride in Place Plan.

APPENDICES

- A Pride in Place – Equality Impact Assessment