

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 15 September 2026

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Ellie Plater (Chair), Matthew Hurst CC (Vice-Chair), Jim Brown, Andy McGuinness, Jeff Bullock, Lynda Guy, Peter Clark, Claire Parris, Jackie Hollywell, Ricki Rands, Jade Woods and Jaysica Marvell

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.15pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Leanne Brady, Phil Bibby and Tom Wren.

Councillors Lynda Guy and Jaysica Marvell were present as substitutes.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 21 July 2026 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**3 PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - GENERAL FUND MEDIUM TERM
FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE (2026/27 - 2030/31)**

The Committee received an update on the general fund medium term financial strategy. A report had been considered by Cabinet the previous week and all recommendations had been approved.

Members asked whether the Council would seek to recover expenditure incurred in relation to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), following the Government's announcement regarding the potential reimbursement of certain costs. Members were advised that the Council remained alert to the opportunity and would pursue any funding available. Expenditure to date was reported as approximately £14,000 in 2024/25 and £106,000 in 2025/26, with £500,000 having been set aside for 2026/27 and a further £500,000 subsequently allocated in anticipation of the implementation timetable. It was noted that County Council programme office costs had not yet been billed and that, following the pause in the LGR process, staff had been stood down from further expenditure. The Committee also discussed the wider staffing opportunity costs associated with LGR, with approximately 30 staff across the organisation having been involved, although these costs had not been included within the figures reported.

The Committee was advised that the pause in LGR could provide additional time for officers to undertake necessary systems and preparatory work, including the implementation of payroll and finance systems, should the timetable be extended.

In response to a query regarding the transfer of expenditure from capital to revenue, it was explained that the treatment reflected the nature of the work being undertaken. While staff costs associated with bringing assets into use could be charged to capital, much of the current work, particularly in relation to cloud-based IT services, constituted revenue expenditure and therefore could no longer appropriately be funded from capital.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

4 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - HRA MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY REVIEW**

The Committee received an update on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2026/27 to 2030/31, which provided an assessment of the long-term financial sustainability of the HRA. It was noted that, although the HRA remained financially viable, pressures arising from inflation, borrowing costs, and forthcoming building safety and regulatory requirements would continue to be monitored. The nine recommendations presented to Cabinet had been approved.

In response to questions regarding financial resilience and stress testing, officers explained that a range of measures were in place, including maintaining a minimum HRA balance of £10 million, setting aside resources for debt repayment, limiting long-term borrowing where possible and spreading debt maturities to avoid significant repayments falling due in a single year. The HRA business plan incorporated borrowing assumptions and was reviewed over both a minimum five-year period and the longer-term 30-year plan. It was clarified that HRA debt was ring-fenced and was funded through HRA income rather than Council Tax.

Members were advised that the Council had a planned approach to repaying debt, while grant funding, private sales and a proportion of affordable housing within development schemes were used to support the delivery of new homes and maintain affordability. The Committee welcomed the explanation and acknowledged the work undertaken by officers to identify innovative approaches to supporting social and affordable housing delivery.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

5 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - 1ST QUARTER REVENUE AND CAPITAL MONITORING REPORT 2026/27 – GENERAL FUND AND HRA**

The Committee received an update on the first quarter Revenue and Capital Monitoring Report for 2026/27, covering the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Capital Programme. The report identified an overall underspend, although it was noted that it was still early in the financial year and budgets would continue to be closely monitored.

Underlying financial pressures had been absorbed, with the majority of the underspend arising from the reprofiling of capital expenditure into future years and the resulting interest generated on grants held by the Council, providing a one-off benefit to both the General Fund and HRA. The Cabinet had approved all twelve recommendations contained within the report.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

6 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2025/26 AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS**

The Committee received an update on the Annual Treasury Management Review for 2025/26 that had been approved by Cabinet. It was reported that Treasury Management activities had been undertaken in accordance with statutory requirements, the CIPFA Code and the Council's approved Treasury Management Practices. No breaches had occurred during the year, and the Council had maintained compliance with all approved Prudential Indicators, operational boundaries and authorised borrowing limits.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

7 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - CORPORATE PERFORMANCE QUARTER 1 2026/27**

The Committee received an update on the Quarter 1 Corporate Performance Report for 2026/27, which provided progress against the Council's priority programmes and projects and the corporate performance suite. Cabinet had approved the recommendations and noted progress in supporting adult retraining and education, including the opening of the new North Herts College town centre campus, the New Build Programme and key capital projects including the Sports and Leisure Centre, Ridlins Athletics Track and play provision.

Members also noted preparations for the Council's 80th Anniversary events programme and ongoing work on the Climate Change Strategy, with a further report due in October.

Members discussed performance in relation to void properties, damp and mould and graffiti. Officers advised that tenancy audits were being strengthened, with recharge and restrictions on transfers being considered where properties were not maintained to an acceptable standard.

In relation to Awaab's Law, the Council was working to improve access, case management, triage, and diagnosis, with additional funding allocated and further statutory requirements due to take effect. In relation to the legal reporting requirements within Awaab's Law for new damp and mould cases within the legal deadlines of 10 days, it is difficult to comply with the legislation as tenants must allow the Council access to inspect the property but in some cases the tenant does not always allow swift access to the property, which results in the Council having distorted performance indicators. Often the tenant is happy to extend this period if it

knows that the Council is taking action against the damp and mould, but the Council has to report the time it takes to carry out an inspection and this is why Officers and the Cabinet Portfolio Holder are looking at reviewing the current access arrangements. Graffiti removal remained a challenge, particularly where responsibility was shared between the Council, Hertfordshire County Council and other landowners, although additional resources and contractors had been deployed. Members were advised that the County Council's Ringway contract had commenced in October 2025 for an initial seven years, with options for extension, and that consideration was being given to protective surfaces and artwork in underpasses to help prevent and facilitate the removal of graffiti.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

8 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - HOUSING ANNUAL REPORT, ANNUAL COMPLAINTS SELF-ASSESSMENT AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2025/26**

The Committee received the Housing Annual Report, including the annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and the Housing Complaints and Service Improvement Report and Plan.

Members noted the assessment of tenants' experiences, which had identified areas of good performance and opportunities for improvement, particularly in relation to communication and preventing complaints from arising.

It was noted that the Council continued to work closely with the Housing Ombudsman, with any judgments or determinations reported to Cabinet through the quarterly Corporate Performance Report. Cabinet supported all three recommendations, including the submission of the required reports to the Housing Ombudsman by the end of September.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

9 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - GSK RELOCATION UPDATE: IMPACT, RESPONSE AND OPTIONS**

The Committee received an update on the report that went to Cabinet regarding GSK's announcement that it intended to relocate its existing Stevenage site to Cambridge, noting the potential economic impact of approximately £80 million per annum without intervention. Members were advised that the Council remained confident in Stevenage's strong life sciences and defence sectors and had already engaged with Government, GSK and other partners to understand the implications and explore opportunities arising from the relocation. It was noted that discussions remained at an early stage, including consideration of the future of the site, potential impacts on employees and the possibility of a legacy for Stevenage, including skills initiatives.

Members discussed the reasons for the relocation and its potential implications for infrastructure, employment and the future use of the site. Officers advised that the Council did not have formal information on GSK's commercial reasons for the

decision but would continue discussions regarding the site and its infrastructure requirements, including the implications for the planned redevelopment of the nearby roundabout.

Officers confirmed that the Council would also consider appropriate planning levers and develop an evidence base to inform its approach, including potential funding streams and, if appropriate, options such as an enterprise zone. It was confirmed that the relocation related to GSK's existing site and that the adjacent Catapult and Catalyst facilities were expected to remain, while the future use of the GSK site remained uncertain.

Members emphasised the importance of diversifying employment opportunities in Stevenage and ensuring that future development provided a broad range of jobs and opportunities for local residents. The importance of maintaining close relationships with major businesses in the town was also highlighted, with officers confirming that ongoing discussion with businesses would continue through the Stevenage Development Board and other engagement activity. It was noted that the Council had been proactive in engaging with businesses following the GSK announcement and would continue to explore public and private funding opportunities, while seeking to maximise the long-term economic and employment benefits for Stevenage.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

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

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

11 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

The Committee received an update on the urgent Part 1 report that went to Cabinet regarding the Government's decision to pause the proposed Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme. Members were advised that local authorities had been asked to pause implementation work, although appropriate preparatory activity could continue.

It was noted that the May 2027 local elections would proceed as scheduled, rather than the anticipated elections to shadow authorities, and that LGR had not been abandoned but remained subject to the outcome of the review. The Leader had expressed the Council's commitment to working with partners to seek clarity from Government, while maintaining effective service delivery and supporting staff during the period of uncertainty.

Members discussed the resources and expertise that had been committed to LGR and whether this capacity could be redirected towards other priorities during the pause. Officers advised that approximately 40–50 Stevenage Borough Council staff had contributed to the Hertfordshire-wide programme across a range of workstreams, predominantly alongside their existing roles, with associated consultancy support also having been scaled back. It was clarified that funding

allocated specifically for LGR could not simply be redirected to other purposes, although opportunities to support local economic growth could be considered through existing commitments and future budget-setting processes.

Members were also advised that Hertfordshire had proposed a Mayoral Strategic Authority covering the county and that a ministerial decision was awaited, with further detail on devolution expected in due course.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

12 **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.

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

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21 July 2026 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

14 **PART II DECISION OF THE CABINET - WHOLLY OWNED COMPANIES UPDATE REPORT**

The Committee received an update regarding the Wholly Owned Companies report.

The Committee asked several questions which officers responded to.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

15 **PART II DECISION OF THE CABINET - COUNCIL TAX AND HOUSING RENT AND RECHARGEABLE DEBT WRITE OFFS GREATER THAN £10,000**

The Committee received an update regarding the Council Tax and Housing Rent and rechargeable debt write offs report.

The Committee asked several questions which officers responded to.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the decisions of Cabinet.

16 **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.

17 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR