

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 22 September 2026

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Jim Brown (Chair), Rob Henry (Vice-Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren, Peter Clark, Jackie Hollywell, Matthew Hurst CC, Peter Wilkins, Nigel Williams and Jade Woods

Start / End Start Time: 18:00
Time: End Time: 19:30

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dermot Kehoe, Lynda Guy, Liam Morrell Phillips and Jaysica Marvell.

Councillor Peter Clark was present as a substitute for Councillor Dermot Kehoe.
Councillor Peter Wilkins was present as a substitute for Councillor Jaysica Marvell.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Community Select Meeting on 23 July 2026 be approved as correct records and signed by the Chair.

3 INTERVIEW WITH MEMBERS OF THE YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

The Chair invited members of the Committee to introduce themselves to representatives of the Youth Advisory Board, who were attending the meeting to provide feedback as part of the Support for Young People Review.

Experiences and Priorities of Young People

The Committee received evidence from five members of the Youth Advisory Board, who presented responses to eight questions concerning the experiences and priorities of young people in Stevenage. The main challenges identified included pressure relating to school and examinations, mental health, friendships, social media, money and future choices, together with difficulties in accessing employment, work experience and other opportunities. Members of the Youth Advisory Board reported that young people did not always feel listened to or taken seriously, particularly when raising concerns about their mental health or personal experiences. It was considered important that opportunities for young people to express their views should lead to demonstrable change and that young people should have a greater role in decisions concerning services and support. The Board also highlighted barriers to accessing opportunities, including transport, cost and a lack of awareness about where opportunities could be found. More work experience,

volunteering, mentoring, affordable activities and safe spaces were identified as being beneficial.

Education, Employment and Preparation for Adulthood

The Board considered Stevenage to have a strong sense of community and good potential for young people, although there was a perceived lack of activities and opportunities specifically aimed at teenagers and young adults. Members discussed whether they expected to remain in Stevenage in the longer term, with views dependent upon future education, employment and career opportunities and whether the town continued to improve for young people. It was also felt that education could provide more preparation for practical aspects of adult life, including money management, careers, employment, relationships, mental health, managing stress and understanding local and wider issues.

Young People's Voice and Participation

During discussion, members explored the extent to which young people felt able to speak openly about their experiences, particularly within schools. The Youth Advisory Board described concerns around judgement, trust and whether disclosures would be treated confidentially and seriously. The effectiveness of pastoral support was discussed, with the Board emphasising that the manner in which trusted adults presented themselves could affect whether young people felt comfortable approaching them. Members also discussed school councils and opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making. It was suggested that requiring students to speak publicly to their peers could discourage participation and that alternative or anonymous methods of expressing views and voting could enable a wider range of young people to take part.

Engagement, Activities and Opportunities

The Committee explored how the Council could engage with young people outside the school environment, particularly those who were not already involved in youth participation arrangements. The Youth Advisory Board thought that their peers in school would not engage with the traditional ways the Council uses social media, such as Facebook, but young people would be more inclined to engage with more informal engaging content on platforms like TikTok.

The Board also highlighted the importance of using relatable or inspirational individuals who young people would recognise and trust. Affordable access to sports and other activities was identified as another consideration, with the cost of some clubs potentially acting as a barrier. The use of existing facilities and venues for young people was also discussed, including concerns about the condition and safety of some spaces and the need to ensure that youth facilities were accessible and well promoted.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental health was a particularly strong theme throughout the evidence session. Members of the Youth Advisory Board considered that support and referral pathways existed but were not sufficiently well publicised, meaning that young people could be unaware of where to seek help. The Board referred to local organisations providing safe spaces and support but considered that greater publicity and clearer information about available services would help young people access assistance before problems became overwhelming. The Committee noted

the potential for the Council to work with partners to consider how awareness and access to support could be improved.

Community Safety

Community safety and young people's perceptions of Stevenage were also discussed. The Board reported that some young people perceived parts of the town as unsafe, with concerns relating to antisocial behaviour, youth crime and uncertainty about what might happen when travelling around the town alone. One member expressed concern about feeling unable to visit the town centre alone and suggested that a greater visible police presence could help young people feel safer. It was also noted that perceptions of particular areas could be influenced by what young people heard from others.

The Committee was advised that the Council's Community Development Team had undertaken work with residents concerning perceptions of crime and antisocial behaviour, and an invitation was extended to members of the Youth Advisory Board to engage directly with the Community Safety Team and identify locations or circumstances where young people felt unsafe.

Key Findings and Areas for Further Consideration

In drawing the evidence together, the Committee identified a number of key themes for consideration as part of the review. These included improving access to mental health support and information; increasing access to employment, work experience, volunteering and careers advice; addressing barriers relating to transport and affordability; providing safe and accessible spaces and activities; improving opportunities for young people to influence decisions and ensuring that their views resulted in meaningful action; improving access to practical life skills and real-world experience; and addressing perceptions of safety. The Committee also noted the positive comments made about Stevenage's community and the potential for young people to remain in or return to the town where appropriate opportunities were available.

The Committee emphasised that the purpose of the engagement should not simply be to ask young people for their views, but to consider how those views could be translated into practical outcomes. Members noted the importance of empowering young people to speak for themselves and ensuring that their voices were heard and respected. The session was considered valuable in providing direct evidence from young people and in identifying areas where the review could explore potential improvements and partnership working.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the presentation and feedback provided by the Youth Advisory Board.

4 INTERVIEW WITH THE CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Skills and Young People welcomed the opportunity to hear directly from the Youth Advisory Board and emphasised the importance of providing young people with a platform to speak, be heard and have greater autonomy over decisions affecting their lives. They stated that young people

should be treated with respect and that their views and experiences should inform the development of services and opportunities. Concern was expressed regarding the experiences of young people within education, including the importance of schools listening to students, responding to their individual needs and supporting a broader understanding of aspiration. It was noted that academic achievement and progression to university were not the only measures of success, and that vocational education, trades and practical skills should be recognised as equally valid pathways. The recent opening of the college campus in Stevenage town centre was welcomed, and the importance of ensuring that young people considering vocational training felt that this was an equally valued route was emphasised.

At this juncture a discussion was had regarding school uniform policies and the potential impact on pupils' wellbeing, comfort, attendance and engagement, with examples of alternative approaches being highlighted such as a more PE kit style uniform.

The Committee also discussed support for young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET), with examples highlighting difficulties experienced by young people seeking to access further education. It was noted that work was taking place to identify gaps in support and improve access to opportunities. Members were advised that Stevenage had been approved for a Youth Hub and that meaningful engagement with young people would be essential in determining its purpose and services. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that consultation reached a wide range of young people, including those who were home educated and those who were NEET, and that their views directly influenced the development of the Hub. The changing role and use of the Bowes Lyon facility was also discussed, with a desire expressed to explore opportunities to recreate some of its previous youth-focused functions and develop similar provision through the Youth Hub. In response to questions regarding young people's travel, the Portfolio Holder expressed support for free or genuinely affordable bus travel for young people, noting the potential to reduce isolation and improve access to employment, education and social opportunities. Members and young people shared experiences of the benefits and limitations of existing travel provision, including the cost of regular bus travel and the use of free bus travel during the summer. It was suggested that affordable travel could provide young people with greater independence and enable them to access activities and facilities outside Stevenage.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of ensuring that young people were able to express themselves and were not disadvantaged by inflexible approaches within education. Members reflected on personal experiences of school and the potential impact of educational structures and expectations on young people's opportunities. The Youth Advisory Board provided examples of how affordable travel had enabled them to access leisure facilities outside Stevenage, particularly where there were limited activities available locally. Both the Chair of the Committee and the Portfolio Holder thanked the young people for their openness and encouraged continued dialogue, including opportunities for Members to visit or engage directly with young people in settings where they felt comfortable.

It was **RESOLVED** that the feedback be noted as part of the review.

5 **MAPPING DOCUMENT FOR THE SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY REVIEW**

The Committee considered the proposed work programme for the Support for Young People review, which sought to capture the various themes and strands identified to date. Members noted that engagement had already taken place with the Youth Advisory Board and relevant Portfolio Holder, with further evidence-gathering planned with the Health and Wellbeing Manager, Everyone Active and Stevenage Football Club. The Committee also intended to engage with Children's Services, Services for Young People, young carers' services and other relevant organisations, alongside consideration of safeguarding, home-educated children, SEND provision, educational outcomes and careers guidance. Members also noted the links with the Environment and Economy Committee's work on skills and a potential visit to the college to meet students and staff and consider the new campus.

Members discussed the importance of ensuring that the review reflected the full range of youth provision available within Stevenage, including community groups, youth facilities, sports clubs and other voluntary organisations. It was agreed that further consideration would be given to engaging with organisations such as local youth facilities and community groups, and officers would investigate whether a comprehensive list of youth provision was available for circulation to the Committee. Members were invited to identify any further areas or organisations that should be included, noting the limited timeframe for completing the review and the intention to publish the final report by February. The Committee was broadly satisfied with the proposed programme of work and agreed to proceed on that basis.

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

6 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

7 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

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 involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

8 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR