STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 13 October 2026
Time: 6.00pm
Place: Council Chamber - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Matthew Hurst CC (Chair), Jim Brown, Andy McGuinness, Philip Bibby, Jeff Bullock, Peter Clark, Jackie Hollywell, Ricki Rands, Jade Woods, Tom Wren and Lynda Guy

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.20pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Leanne Brady, Ellie Plater and Claire Parris.

Councillor Lynda Guy was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Claire Parris.

Councillor Matthrew Hurst was in attendance as Chair for the meeting.

Councillor Andy McGuinness declared an interest in Item 6 due to working for Arthritis UK.

Councillor Matthrew Hurst declared an interest in Item 5 due to being a tenant of Stevenage Borough Council.

At this juncture, the Committee was updated on the Government's intention to close the Novotel asylum accommodation hotel by Christmas 2026. The Council reiterated its opposition to the use of both the Novotel and Ibis hotels for asylum accommodation, citing the impact on local services, community cohesion and residents.

The Council welcomed the planned Novotel closure but sought clarification on the future of the Ibis hotel. Officers confirmed that responsibility for relocating asylum seekers rested with the Home Office. In response to a question about potential enforcement action, officers confirmed that options had been investigated in relation to the Novotel, but no investigations were currently underway regarding the Ibis hotel, and were awaiting clarification from the Home Office on its intended closure.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 15 September 2026 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES**

The Committee received an update on the proposed fees and charges for 2027/28, which formed part of the Council's annual budget-setting process and covered both the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The proposed changes were expected to generate approximately £240,000 in additional General Fund income, representing an increase of just under 2%, and £12,000 for the HRA, an increase of approximately 1.56%. These increases were below the latest Consumer Prices Index (CPI) inflation rate of 3.1%.

A number of charges were proposed to remain unchanged, including off-street parking for up to one hour, on-street town centre parking, trade waste and selected season tickets. The additional General Fund income would help address the projected £350,000 budget gap for 2027/28 identified in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy presented to Cabinet in September.

Members questioned why the fees and charges proposals had not been considered through the Financial Security Group. It was noted that arrangements were now being made for the Group to consider capital bids and undertake further work on the budget.

Members questioned the differences in on-street parking permit charges between areas, and questioned whether the cost of additional permits could be increased. Officers response explained that permit schemes were based on cost recovery, and were not intended to generate a profit. It was further noted that Officers regularly reviewed permit arrangements and Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) where parking was causing local issues.

Questions were raised whether a licensing fee could be introduced for the use of Council grass verges to store construction materials for extended periods. Officers confirmed that this suggestion would be considered with the relevant services to establish whether a charge could be introduced.

Members asked whether consideration had been given to introducing a short period of free parking in the town centre and old town car parks to encourage visits and support local businesses. Officers explained that providing one hour of free parking would result in an estimated loss of approximately £433,000 in income. It was emphasised that parking charges were intended to help balance the Council's budget and fund services that did not generate income, rather than to maximise commercial returns.

Members discussed the proposal for a free hour of parking at Westgate and whether Westgate representations had been fully considered. Officers confirmed that discussions had been ongoing since July, but the examples given did not include sufficient evidence to demonstrate the benefits of the proposal. Officers had assessed the potential costs and wider impact of introducing free parking, including the displacement of vehicles from other town centre car parks. It was noted that the matter would be discussed further at a meeting with Westgate in November.

Officers advised that a free parking trial would require evidence of its benefits and long-term affordability, noting that research did not consistently show increased local spending. The proposed 2027/28 charges aimed to balance the Council's budget while limiting increases where possible. Officers also highlighted ongoing partnership work with Westgate, including environmental improvements, the £1 million investment in the centre and opportunities to encourage college students to spend locally.

Members suggested exploring a scheme offering free parking to customers spending a specified amount at town centre businesses. Officers noted that any scheme would need to be fair, consider potential legal implications and be explored through town centre partnership discussions.

In response to a question about the principles guiding decisions on which charges to freeze or increase, officers explained that different considerations applied to different services. This included cost recovery, competition with the private sector, and the current cost-of-living.

Discussions took place regarding the impact of larger vehicles on parking capacity and suggested that free bus passes could provide an alternative way of supporting town centre access and wider Council objectives. It was noted that bus passes were the responsibility of the County Council, rather than the Borough Council.

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

4 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - CLIMATE CHANGE - ANNUAL UPDATE OCTOBER 2026**

The Committee considered the Climate Change Annual Update for 2025/26, which reported reductions in both town-wide and Council emissions, and outlined proposed actions for the following year.

Members questioned the environmental standards applied to new residential and commercial developments, including the installation of solar panels. Officers explained that standards were influenced by national building regulations, but the Local Plan set policies on energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Members also asked for clearer information on the progress towards the Council's 2030 net zero target. The updated baseline was approximately 2,714 tonnes of CO_2 equivalent, with emissions having reduced by 9.5% compared with the previous year. Officers acknowledged that achieving net zero by 2030 would be challenging and would require increased interventions, including National Government support.

Members questioned the accuracy of the tree-planting map in the report, noting that most of the trees appeared to be located outside Stevenage's boundary. In response, it was noted that although some trees had been planted outside the boundary, they were located close to Stevenage. It was also noted that the Community Infrastructure Levy funding had also supported the planting of several Miyawaki woods within the town's urban area.

Officers also explained that future planning policies could help reduce transport emissions by directing development towards sustainable locations. Officers also agreed to consider drinking fountains and shaded areas as part of the development of the Council's climate change adaptation strategy.

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

5 **PART I DECSION OF THE CABINET - HOUSING INCOME AND ARREARS RECOVERY POLICY 2026 - 2028**

The Committee noted the draft Housing Income and Arrears Recovery Policy 2026-28, which updated the previous policy to reflect legislative changes and emphasised early intervention and support for tenants experiencing financial difficulties.

No questions were raised by the Committee.

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

6 **PART I DECISION OF THE CABINET - HEALTHY STEVENAGE STRATEGY 2026 - 2031**

The Committee received an update on the Healthy Stevenage Strategy 2026–2031, which was replacing the original strategy launched in 2018.

The refreshed strategy was informed by the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), resident consultation and partner engagement, and identified five strategic priorities to address local health inequalities. Members were advised that the focus would now be on developing an action plan with partners to strengthen prevention and deliver targeted interventions.

Members questioned how the success of the strategy would be measured, noting that Stevenage's health profile had shown limited improvement. Officers explained that individual initiatives could be monitored, although measurable improvements in population health would take longer to develop.

Members questioned the homelessness figure of '17 per 1,000 people', which appeared to indicate that approximately 1,530 people in Stevenage were homeless, and sought clarification on the accuracy of this figure. In response, it was noted that Officers check and review, and respond back to the Committee.

Members highlighted the need to address health inequalities in areas of deprivation across Stevenage. The importance of housing conditions, environmental health, pollution, noise, falls prevention and promoting physical activity were also discussed. Officers advised that targeted interventions would be developed with partners to address the specific needs of areas experiencing greater deprivation.

Members also raised the importance of access to GPs and the relationship between health and employment, including occupational health support for businesses. Officers noted that the Council worked with local Primary Care Networks and Stevenage Works, although opportunities to influence GP access were limited.

Members felt that the links between employment and health could be strengthened within the strategy.

The Committee discussed the need to improve communication with residents about available health and wellbeing services. Officers acknowledged this and were working towards improved communication, partnership working and a ‘no wrong door’ approach as key priorities.

Members also asked whether specific support could be provided for carers under the mental health and emotional wellbeing priority. Officers agreed to take this away for further consideration with partners.

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

7 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.

8 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

9 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.

10 PART II MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 September 2026 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

11 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.

12 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR