STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 20 October 2026
Time: 6.00pm
Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Jim Brown (Chair), , Wendy Rouse CC, Julie Ashley-Wren, Dermot Kehoe, Jackie Hollywell, Matthew Hurst CC, Jaysica Marvell, Liam Morrell Phillips and Jade Woods

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 8.00pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nigel Williams, Lynda Guy, and Rob Henry.

Councillor Wendy Rouse was present as a substitute for Councillor Rob Henry.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Community Select Meeting on 22 September 2026 be approved as correct records and signed by the Chair.

3 SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE REVIEW - INTERVIEW WITH HEALTH & WELLBEING MANAGER & EXTERNAL PARTNERS

Health and Wellbeing for Young People – SBC Officers

Officers provided an overview of initiatives delivered and supported by the Council and its partners to improve the health, wellbeing and leisure opportunities available to young people in Stevenage. Members were advised that the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment identified that 18% of Reception-aged children and 37% of Year 6 children were classified as overweight or obese, with figures higher than the Hertfordshire average. GCSE attainment was also below the Hertfordshire and national averages, while half of mental health conditions began before the age of 14. Officers highlighted the links between health inequalities and deprivation and emphasised the importance of early intervention and preventative support.

The Committee received an update on the work of the Healthy Hub, established in Stevenage in 2016, and the Young People's Healthy Hub, launched in 2020 with funding from Hertfordshire County Council. Initiatives had included physical activity sessions, basketball, community kitchens, the Empower Her programme to support girls' confidence and body image, youth festivals and counselling support delivered in partnership with Mind in Mid Herts. Following changes to County Council funding,

the Healthy Hub programmes had merged in 2025, with ongoing work being delivered through the Active Communities project. The Council had also worked with partners to provide free holiday activities, promote women's and girls' participation in sport through the This Girl Can campaign, support school tree planting and community litter-picking activities, and encourage young people to learn to cycle.

Members were advised of further partnership initiatives, including the Hertfordshire Holiday Activity and Food Programme, which provided eligible children and young people with activities, food and opportunities to socialise during school holidays. The Summer Parks programme had been delivered for a fourth year, with activities shaped by feedback from young people. Stevenage Sporting Futures supported school sport and physical activity across approximately 95% of schools in the town, including programmes promoting mental wellbeing through physical activity. The Committee also heard about the Council's work with local sports clubs and the decision in 2025 to bring Sports Stevenage back in-house, with work underway to refresh its role and identify how best to support clubs and the wider sporting community. Improvements to tennis facilities at Shephalbury Park had enabled additional opportunities for schoolchildren and families, including free park tennis sessions. Stevenage Museum was also highlighted as providing work experience, volunteering, educational visits and a youth curators programme to help young people develop skills and engage with local heritage.

During the discussion, Members questioned the increase in childhood obesity between Reception and Year 6 and the methods used to collect the data. Officers confirmed that the figures were based on measurements collected through the public health programme, including school-based assessments, and acknowledged that Body Mass Index (BMI) had limitations as a measure of individual health and fitness. Officers explained that the impact of preventative initiatives might take several years to become evident and highlighted the importance of working with schools, families and community partners to encourage physical activity and healthy eating. Members also emphasised the importance of engaging parents in supporting sustainable behavioural changes. Officers noted that the children's weight management service included family support and could be accessed through self-referral or referrals from schools.

Update from Everyone Active

Danny Kingston, Activity and Wellbeing Manager for Everyone Active, provided an overview of the programmes and initiatives delivered since the commencement of the leisure contract with Stevenage Borough Council (SBC), with a focus on improving health and wellbeing and increasing opportunities for young people and families.

The Committee was advised that the Healthy Hub signposted young people and families to support services, including the Beezee Families programme, mental health support through Mind, and Henry in Herts, which provided advice on healthy eating and nutrition. The Mobile Healthy Hub also attended community events to promote available services and provide health and wellbeing information. Everyone Active promoted its activities through its website, social media, email campaigns, notifications and the Moving More platform, which enabled families to search for

local activities, prices and booking information.

At the Stevenage Leisure Centre, a range of activities was available, including home education PE sessions, SEND provision, junior badminton and pickleball academies, holiday camps and a Junior Gym scheme. The Committee noted the success of an 11-week funded girls' cricket programme, which attracted 72 participants and provided a pathway into Stevenage Cricket Club. The asylum seekers programme had also been successful, with plans to relaunch it. The Everyone is Family initiative offered subsidised £2 activities, including badminton, table tennis and pickleball, during the summer holidays.

At the Stevenage Swimming Centre, provision included adult and child swimming lessons, family swimming and school swimming, with 18 Stevenage schools participating weekly. Home education swimming sessions had also expanded to four sessions per week. The Committee noted the success of the School Swimming Top-Up Initiative, which offered places to Year 6 pupils who had not achieved the required swimming standard before leaving primary school. A total of 102 pupils participated, with more than 24 achieving their swimming badge. A funded foster care and baby programme had also provided access to swimming sessions for families who might otherwise have faced barriers to participation.

The golf facilities had seen significant growth in junior participation, with membership increasing from seven children under 17 in April 2023 to 98. The Junior Golf Academy had been brought in-house to meet demand, and a summer programme delivered with the Herts Sports Partnership had involved 87 young people in golf, physical activity and enrichment activities. School engagement had also increased, with events and competitions delivered in partnership with Sporting Futures and local schools.

The Committee heard about community outreach initiatives, including attendance at Stevenage Day, Sport in the Park and other local events using the Healthy Hub trailer. A Bedwell Fun Day had provided family activities, followed by free multi-sports and table tennis sessions during the summer holidays. A youth hub initiative at St Nicholas Pavilion had not attracted sufficient participation and had therefore ceased, although its future relaunch would be considered. Other initiatives included the Basketball Roadshow, which delivered sessions during the summer holidays, and This Girl Can Week, which attracted more than 200 women and girls to free activities.

At Ridlins Athletics Track, activities included sports days for home-educated children, athletics camps, school events and competitions. The Sporting Champions scheme provided free leisure memberships, workshops and mentoring opportunities for local athletes competing at regional level and above. There were currently 20 Sporting Champions in Stevenage. A new darts academy was also due to launch, offering adult, family and junior sessions and opportunities for school and community competitions.

Finally, the Committee was advised that Everyone Active employed 28 young people aged 16–17 within the Stevenage contract and had recently introduced leisure industry apprenticeships in partnership with SCL, with two apprentices recruited

across the leisure and swimming centres. Links with the Gordon Craig Theatre were also being developed in relation to a proposed theatre apprenticeship scheme. Although Everyone Active's policy prevented it from offering work experience to under-18s, young people were signposted towards apprenticeships and alternative opportunities. Officers also attended local careers fairs to promote employment pathways within the leisure industry, including progression from lifeguarding into management roles.

At this juncture a question was asked about the take-up of the £2 summer programme offer and how it had been promoted to families, noting that it provided valuable, affordable access to leisure facilities during the cost-of-living crisis. The Activity and Wellbeing Manager advised that the offer had been promoted through various channels, including email campaigns, social media and Moving More. During the six-week summer period, 96 bookings had been made for activities, including badminton, pickleball and table tennis, at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre.

Stevenage Football Club Foundation

Pete Beeley, Chief Executive Officer of Stevenage Football Club Foundation, presented the Foundation's new strategy to 2030, which aimed to strengthen the social impact of its work alongside sport and physical activity. Members were advised that the Foundation had reached over 13,000 people during the previous year, delivering approximately 180 sessions each week across 30 projects, with an independently evaluated social value of £15.7 million. The strategy was structured around four age-related pillars: Strong Foundations for primary school-aged children, Positive Pathways for secondary school-aged children, Thriving Lives for adults and Active Ageing for older adults, supported by wider club and community engagement.

The Strong Foundations programme focused on supporting primary school-aged children to develop physical health, emotional literacy, social skills and resilience. The Foundation worked with 58% of primary schools in Stevenage and the surrounding villages, supporting 2,757 children during the previous year. Programmes included Premier League Primary Stars, Joy of Moving, Happy Camps, lunch clubs and after-school activities. Members were advised that funding from the Premier League Foundation enabled subsidised or free provision, with additional tailored support available to address individual schools' needs.

Concerns were raised that increasing academic pressures and additional Saturday revision sessions were affecting young people's ability to participate in voluntary sports clubs, highlighting the importance of maintaining a healthy balance between education and extracurricular activities.

The Positive Pathways programme supported young people through the challenges of adolescence and their transition into adulthood. Members heard that trusted relationships with relatable youth workers were central to the approach, alongside mentoring, employability support, school-based interventions and opportunities to develop practical and social skills. The Foundation worked with 70% of Stevenage's secondary schools and had secured further Premier League funding for the INSPIRES programme, which aimed to extend provision to all secondary schools

and alternative provision settings. The programme would support young people with differing levels of engagement, including those at risk of disengaging from education and those already disengaged. Members also heard how the Foundation's football-based activities provided safe spaces for young people, with opportunities to address issues including violence, substance misuse and healthy relationships. The importance of supporting young people to sustain employment and training opportunities, rather than simply accessing them, was emphasised.

In response to questions, members discussed the importance of taking a holistic and sensitive approach to childhood weight, physical activity and wellbeing, recognising the potential impact of body image, undiagnosed conditions and other barriers. The Foundation advised that its approach prioritised play, confidence and emotional development, and that it intended to incorporate body image and self-worth into its wider work on healthy relationships. Members also discussed the relationship between participation in sport, school attendance and GCSE attainment. It was noted that programmes such as INSPIRES could help re-engage young people with education, while providing alternative routes into employment, apprenticeships and careers in sport and leisure. Members highlighted the importance of building self-esteem, resilience and supportive relationships as foundations for future achievement.

Members asked whether a comprehensive directory of sporting and cultural activities was available to young people. Officers advised that the Moving More platform contained details of some local activities, but coverage was incomplete. Work was being considered to reinvigorate Sports Stevenage and develop a more comprehensive database of local clubs and opportunities. A member who had previously served on the Sports Stevenage committee offered to assist with this work. Members also discussed the importance of identifying and engaging with culturally diverse and self-organising community groups, ensuring that their activities were recognised and that appropriate support and signposting were available.

The Chair drew on an example from their time as Mayor to highlight the importance of the Council engaging more effectively with self-sustaining and culturally diverse community groups to better understand and support the sporting activities and opportunities they provided for young people.

Finally, members considered how best to communicate opportunities directly to young people. It was acknowledged that Council social media channels might not effectively reach younger audiences and that greater use could be made of partner organisations, the Youth Mayor and the Youth Advisory Board to promote activities and opportunities. The potential for targeted social media engagement was discussed, including the possibility of support from members with relevant expertise.

It was **RESOLVED** that the information provided be noted as part of the Support for Young People review.

4 **SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE REVIEW - INTERVIEW WITH HEAD OF COMMUNITY ADVICE & SUPPORT**

Safeguarding, child exploitation and safety of home educated children

The Committee received a presentation from the Council's Safeguarding Lead on safeguarding activity during 2025/26, including key referral data, emerging concerns, partnership working and staff training.

Members were advised that the Council had received 94 adult safeguarding referrals and 89 child safeguarding referrals, alongside 185 information-sharing requests from Adult Care and Children's Services. A further 88 Prevent intelligence checks had been undertaken. It was reported that 93% of child safeguarding referrals related to concerns suggesting sustained abuse rather than isolated incidents, with domestic abuse linked to 67% of referrals. The Safeguarding Lead emphasised the importance of early identification and timely referrals, noting that individual observations made by Council employees could contribute to a wider understanding of a family's circumstances. Changes to consent requirements had also helped facilitate referrals, although individuals would normally be informed where appropriate.

The Committee was advised of the Council's work to address domestic abuse, neglect and psychological and emotional harm. Staff were encouraged to remain alert to potential safeguarding concerns and seek advice from designated safeguarding personnel. Family Intervention Workers also provided practical support to families, including assistance with household routines, school attendance and sustaining tenancies.

Members received an update on child exploitation, including sexual, criminal, online and financial exploitation. The Council had supported educational resources on county lines, including films available to schools and parents, and delivered awareness sessions to help identify signs of grooming and exploitation. The police received an average of ten child sexual exploitation referrals each month. Child exploitation remained a priority for the countywide Safeguarding Children's Partnership, which coordinated multi-agency procedures and monitored safeguarding activity. The Council had also begun receiving information through the Vulnerable Adult Strategic Data arrangements, linked to the SoSafe Community Safety Partnership. It was anticipated that sufficient data would become available after a year to identify local trends and help target support.

The Committee discussed the safeguarding implications of increasing numbers of electively home-educated children and school exclusions. Members were advised that 2,112 children were registered as home-educated across Hertfordshire at the end of December 2025, approximately two-thirds of whom were of secondary school age. The Chair indicated this would be approximately 200 children in Stevenage if averaged across the districts. The Community Safety Partnership had requested information on temporary and permanent exclusions in Stevenage to better

understand the pathways of children who disengaged from education. Hertfordshire County Council had expanded its dedicated elective home education team to strengthen oversight and safeguarding. Members highlighted concerns about reduced opportunities to identify welfare issues where children were not regularly attending school, and discussed the importance of understanding why children left mainstream education and whether appropriate support was available.

The Safeguarding Lead confirmed that 51 child safeguarding cases had been closed between April 2025 and March 2026. This represented cases in which concerns had been identified and referrals or interventions had been progressed, rather than necessarily demonstrating a specific long-term outcome. Information-sharing requests were expected to be completed within 48 hours, wherever possible. Members were advised that referral volumes had remained relatively steady, although they might increase following changes to consent requirements. The Council continued to face limitations in accessing outcome data held by Hertfordshire County Council, but sought to improve its understanding of local trends through partnership working.

The Committee also noted the Council's investment in internal safeguarding training. During the preceding 12 months, training had included 87 Level 1 child and adult safeguarding sessions, 130 adult advanced awareness courses, 21 designated safeguarding personnel, 149 Prevent and radicalisation awareness trainees, and 109 people trained in modern slavery and human trafficking. Training was now delivered in-house, enabling it to be tailored to the Council's needs. Safeguarding activity was also reported quarterly to the Senior Leadership Team.

In response to questions, the Safeguarding Lead acknowledged that differences in agencies' thresholds could create challenges but explained that professionals' meetings helped bring organisations together to discuss cases and coordinate action. Staff without direct computer access could raise concerns through designated safeguarding personnel within their teams. Members praised the Council's strong partnership approach and the commitment of the Safeguarding Lead and her team, recognising their contribution to supporting vulnerable residents and strengthening safeguarding across Stevenage.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Safeguarding presentation be noted as part of the Support for Young People review.

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

6 **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 paragraphs1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local

Government (Access toInformation) (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.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR