

# Stevenage 2021

Our town - our future

The third Stevenage Community Strategy



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# Foreword

**Stevenage has a proud history of organisations working closely together. The SoStevenage partnership has been working together for many years to achieve great outcomes for the town and the people of Stevenage.**

As someone who was born and bred in Stevenage, I am passionate about the town and its communities. I am so pleased to see this passion in our partners and colleagues across the borough, who all are working hard together to make Stevenage a place we can be proud of.

As a co-operative partnership, we have long recognised the benefits of working collaboratively with the wider community and local organisations. We know that it is only by working together that we can achieve the best for Stevenage; that we can help to forge a healthy economy, healthy communities and healthy people.

There is a lot to do, and we need to work closely together to overcome the challenges faced by the town. We have to decide what the most important issues are to address in Stevenage, but we can't do this alone. We have to base our work on what local people say is most important to them. The priorities and actions in this strategy have come about through extensive consultation with residents, businesses, community and voluntary groups and other organisations.

None of the issues are easy to tackle, but by working together we can build on the great successes we have already achieved. In this, our third community strategy, we are outlining our commitment as a Co-operative partnership to working together and sharing the dividends. Ultimately we want people to think of Stevenage like we do - as a great place to be.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sharon Taylor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Councillor Sharon Taylor OBE, Chair of SoStevenage**

# SoStevenage

## Community Strategy Executive Summary

### SoStevenage

SoStevenage is our local partnership. It is made up of a wide range of public, private, voluntary and community organisations that have come together to work towards shared goals for Stevenage. SoStevenage is responsible for producing a community strategy and making sure that it is carried out.

### Healthy People

#### What local people have told us:

- they don't always eat very healthily
- they aren't regularly physically active
- they're worried about the future.

#### What SoStevenage will do:

- encourage healthy lifestyle choices
- support good mental health
- make healthy eating and physical activity more accessible.

#### What residents can do:

- keep healthy by eating sensibly and exercising regularly
- make use of the town's open spaces and facilities
- cut down on smoking, especially around children.

### Co-operative Principles

#### SoStevenage has adopted five co-operative principles:

- The partnership as a strong community leader
- Working together with the community and other agencies to provide services based on needs
- Communities empowered to design and deliver services and play a role in their local community
- A clear understanding between the partnership and our communities – this is what we do, this is what we will help you to do
- Joined-up and accessible services that offer value for money and focus on the customer.

### Healthy Economy

#### What local people have told us:

- there aren't enough jobs in the town
- they are worried about debt and budgeting
- they don't have the right skills for local jobs.

#### What SoStevenage will do:

- improve the local economy and housing
- increase skills and employability
- help residents to manage their money.

#### What residents can do:

- use and develop their skills
- take up educational opportunities on offer
- support local shops and businesses.

### Healthy Communities

#### What local people have told us:

- they want to volunteer but they don't know where to start
- they don't always feel safe in the town after dark
- they value the green spaces and parks in the town.

#### What SoStevenage will do:

- support and encourage volunteering
- help people feel safe
- ensure clean and green spaces.

#### What residents can do:

- participate in their local community through volunteering
- respect their neighbours and act lawfully
- respect their environment and act to protect it.

# Introduction

## Stevenage's partnership

SoStevenage is our local partnership made up of a wide range of public, private, voluntary and community organisations working together toward shared goals for Stevenage.

## The first co-operative partnership

In March 2012 SoStevenage adopted a set of principles in its terms of reference outlining our commitment to working co-operatively in everything that we do and making us the first local partnership to work in this way.

### Our five co-operative principles are:

- The partnership as a strong community leader
- Working together with the community and other agencies to provide services based on need
- Communities empowered to design and deliver services and play a role in their local community
- A clear understanding between the partnership and our communities – this is what we do, this is what we will help you to do
- Joined-up and accessible services that offer value for money and focus on the customer.

These principles underpin our common approach and are demonstrated in a number of successful projects and activities. These principles help us to achieve our strategic aim.

The current financial climate has placed increasing pressure on services and therefore we will develop our co-operative focus to work more closely with partners and the public to get the most out of every pound that we spend.

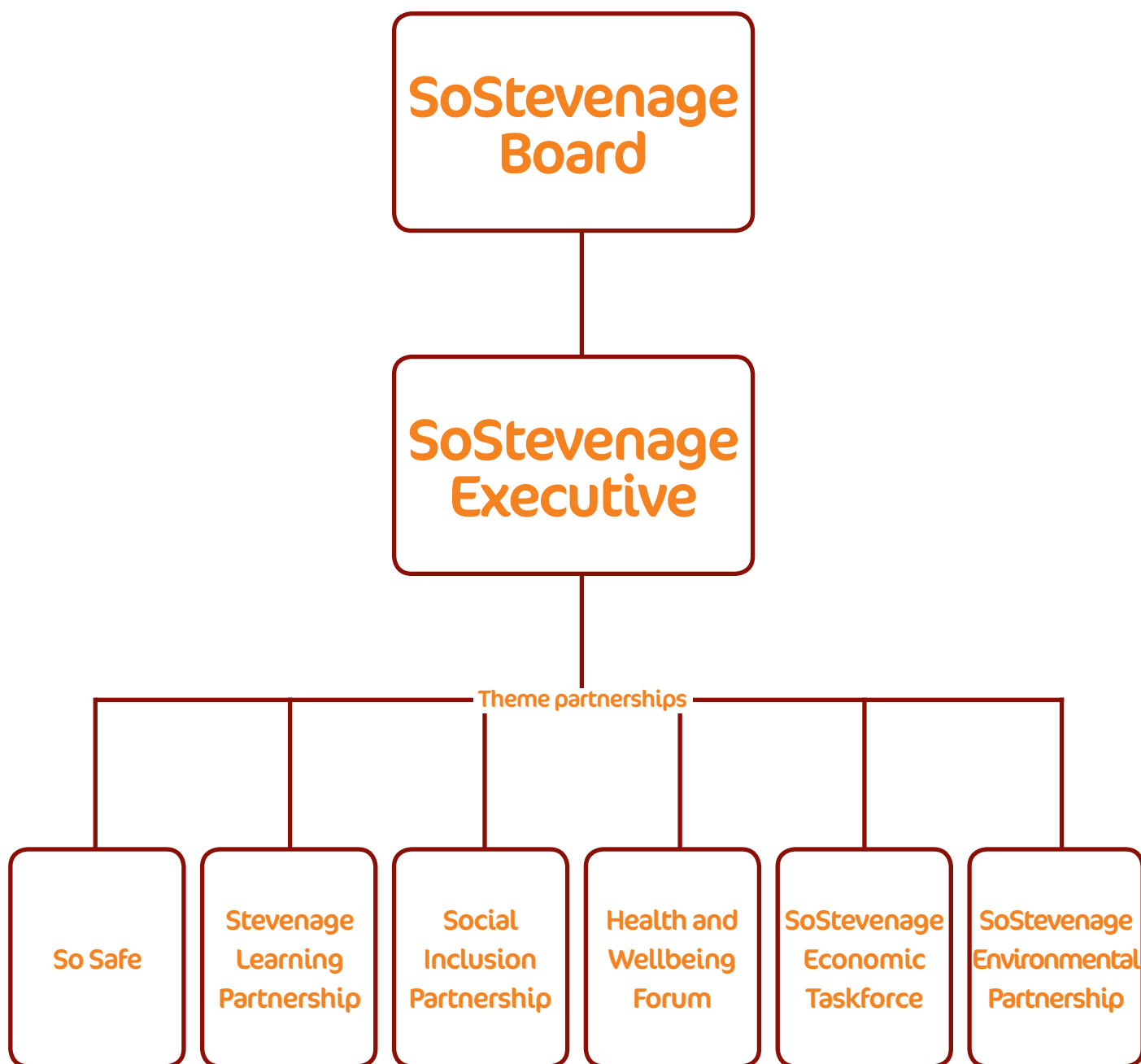
## What are the benefits of being a co-operative partnership?

As a partnership, we want to ensure that the money we spend goes further. We need it to achieve its primary purpose of providing local services for residents, but also to bring even more social rewards and give back to the local community. We call this sharing the dividends. When we work in this way we can create “win-win” situations, where SoStevenage, the organisation we are working with and the community all collectively benefit.

One example of where we have achieved this is our Smokebusters project which aims to reduce the harm caused by second-hand smoking. Nearly 600 people have signed a pledge to stop smoking in their cars and homes and this has helped to reduce smoking in the town. The lower numbers of heavy smokers should reduce the burden on the NHS, freeing up services for those who need them. Cutting back on smoking saves people money, and improves their health and life chances. It's clear that Smokebusters has been a success for SoStevenage, for the council, for the NHS and for local residents.

We believe that by continuing to work in this co-operative way we can maximise the rewards or dividends that can be shared locally.

# SoStevenage structure



# Our Community Strategy

The community strategy is the five year plan for SoStevenage. It outlines the partnership's vision and how we are working together to improve Stevenage and contribute to the development of the town. This is our third community strategy. We published our first strategy back in 2004 and our second in 2007. Since then the partnership has achieved great things. Details of our successes are published each year in an annual report. You can find this on the council's website:

[www.stevenage.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/so-stevenage/33643](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/so-stevenage/33643).

The community strategy sets out a long-term vision of how we want Stevenage to be, as well as the short term goals to get us there. It is impossible to include everything, so we have identified a group of priorities which we think are the most important in the current climate. We've taken into account a range of views and evidence from a variety of people in different ways:

- Stevenage Borough Council's Residents' Survey 2012 results
- Statistics and data from a range of Government sources and local organisations
- Discussions with Stevenage Borough Council councillors
- Brainstorms with SoStevenage member organisations
- Café Choice – residents' views
- Feedback from residents who attended the Stevenage Borough Council Community Conference
- We have also taken central Government guidance into account, including a range of national and regional policies relating to education, health, crime and disorder, the economy and the environment

It is also important to acknowledge that the difficult financial times we are working in means we can no longer afford to provide the full range of services, so we must prioritise to have the greatest effect. We have therefore focused on three key themes and nine priorities where our partners can work co-operatively, add value, and affect change.

## Measuring success

Progress on the delivery of this strategy will be monitored quarterly and reported to the partnership and published annually in Chronicle magazine and on the Stevenage Borough Council website:

[www.stevenage.gov.uk/about-the-council/so-stevenage/](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/about-the-council/so-stevenage/)

# Our vision for Stevenage

## **Stevenage: a prosperous town with vibrant communities and healthy people.**

In order to achieve our vision for Stevenage, we are going to work towards nine top priorities, under three themes;

- Healthy Economy
- Healthy Communities
- Healthy People

These are some of the issues that we feel are important to the town and which we believe can only be addressed effectively through partnership working. This doesn't mean that they are the only issues that are being addressed in the town – each partner has their own priorities in their specific areas. We know that we can make the biggest difference when we work co-operatively, so we've chosen priorities that we think we can address better together.

The following pages will go into more detail about each of these theme areas and the priorities we will be working towards.





# Healthy economy

The struggling economy is one of the biggest challenges that people all over the country are currently facing, causing businesses, public and voluntary sector organisations and individuals to tighten their belts. We know that rejuvenating the economy is vital to being able to support the residents of Stevenage and we want to help local people back into jobs. SoStevenage aims to bring growth and prosperity to the town by improving housing and quality of life, and attracting new people to the town.

## What we've already achieved:

Recently SoStevenage partners have been working on a number of projects related to the development of a healthy economy. Stevenage Borough Council has begun an inward investment campaign to attract new businesses to Stevenage. This is in addition to supporting existing businesses through the council owned Business and Technology Centre (BTC), managed by Wenta. It provides the complete solution for aspiring innovators and entrepreneurs offering advice and support, specialist training, access to finance and introductions to other knowledge based companies and agencies. The Citizens Advice Bureau has been giving free and unbiased debt advice to hundreds of residents who are struggling with their finances. North Herts College has been helping those who are unemployed to gain new skills to get them back into work, and promoting adult and family learning.

SoStevenage has also given a grant to Stevenage Solutions 'Money Money Money' project. They aim to help more than 300 people with debts to manage their money, raise large scale awareness of the Stevenage Credit Union and give them a base with the CAB in the town centre. SoStevenage has also grant-funded Stevenage Solutions to undertake a project working to empower more than 80 young entrepreneurs to create new enterprises through mentoring, training and support. SoStevenage also initiated the mortgage rescue scheme, which has prevented 25 families from becoming homeless.

## How things are at the moment:

There are some world class businesses based in the town including; AVC, MBDA, Fujitsu, Astrium, GlaxoSmithKline, The Wine Society, DuPont, Server Choice and many more. In 2010-11, 255 enterprises were set up, however, 315 were closed. In 2010-11 there were 2950 businesses in Stevenage.

Over the last few years there has been a marked improvement in the percentage of young people achieving 5 or more A\*-C grades at GCSE level, increasing from 42.2% in 2008 to 49% in 2012. However, this is still below the county average of 65.8% and below the national average of 59.4%.

Around 30% of residents have a HND, Degree or Higher Degree level qualifications or equivalent. 49.2% of residents have 2 or more A levels, advanced GNVQ, NVQ 3 or equivalent. A small proportion of the population have no qualifications at all.

There are 7,334 people on the council housing register and there is a large and increasing requirement for additional affordable housing. The housing advice service has recorded a 40% increase in the number of enquiries received in comparison with previous years. 5,716 were reported in 2012/13. However, the Housing Advice and Homelessness team along with key partners (CAB and Herts Young Homeless Group) were able to prevent homelessness on 330 occasions during the same period.

### **What you said:**

In Stevenage Borough Council's Residents' Survey 2012, 20% of residents said that they would find it difficult to get a job in Stevenage because they don't have the right qualifications, training or skills. 13% had no recent experience of work which was preventing them from getting a job. Of the people who think it would be difficult to get a job in Stevenage, 61% said that this was because their skills or qualifications are out of date.

### **Our priorities are to:**

- Improve the local economy and housing
- Increase skills and employability
- Help residents to manage their money
- Understand and address child poverty.

### **Improve the local economy and housing:**

In order to increase the number of jobs and houses, along with improving infrastructure, it is important for us to maximise opportunities for economic growth within the town by supporting businesses, as well as working with partners to deliver housing growth. Stevenage Borough Council has been supporting entrepreneurs and small start-up businesses through the Business and Technology Centre for many years and will continue to do so in order to develop jobs in sustainable and local industries. The partnership wants to improve our engagement with all businesses in the town to find out what needs they have, and how we can best meet them. An important part of improving the local economy is to get more people into the town centre – we will explore opportunities to increase footfall in the town.

The partnership will support the council's housing programme to provide new and affordable housing. We want to increase our engagement with registered social landlords and thereby increase the supply of decent social housing. The partnership intends to address some of the myths that exist around social housing through clear communications. We will promote Stevenage as a good place to live. We want to tackle any negative misconceptions of Stevenage and use our communications to promote the successes of the town, its people and its businesses.

### **Increase skills and employability**

Having the right skills and qualifications is vital to gaining employment and SoStevenage is committed to improving the skills of Stevenage residents. We also want to ensure that the skills developed match local industries and jobs. We want to continue our work to engage hard to reach groups, such as those who are not in education, employment or training, as well as increasing the number and range of work experience placements across the town. To achieve these aims we will engage with the wider business community, as well as other agencies in the town such as the JobCentre Plus.



### **Help residents to manage their money**

Hertfordshire is an affluent county, however there are pockets of relative deprivation and some of these areas are in Stevenage. SoStevenage wants to support residents who feel financially excluded and address poverty in the town. We want to increase peoples financial skills by working with educational organisations and partners to ensure residents of all ages can access training and support on financial matters including budgeting. In order to develop a culture of saving and a climate of financial prudence, SoStevenage will promote the Credit Union. We also need to make sure that we communicate the impacts of the ongoing recession as well as national financial and benefit changes so that people in Stevenage are aware of how changes might impact on their financial situation.

### **Understand and address child poverty**

Child poverty is defined as children living in families where their reported income is less than 60% of the median income.

Child and family poverty is an important issue for SoStevenage with 20% of children in the town estimated to be in poverty. By the age of 16, children from families who qualify for free school meals achieve on average 1.7 grades lower at GCSE. Children raised in poverty are more likely to have lower earnings, complex health histories and a shorter life expectancy.

The SoStevenage partnership is committed to tackling child poverty. Multiple factors affect child poverty and all of the priorities in this strategy aim to help reduce it. The strategy will help us to address the opportunities and obligations arising from the Child Poverty Act 2010. Our work will also support the Hertfordshire Child Poverty Strategy 2011-20.

# Healthy people

While the health of many people in Stevenage is good, there are some wards with health inequalities and where life expectancy is lower than the national average. Life expectancy is shortened by unhealthy lifestyle choices which can also increase the number of years individuals spend in ill health. We need to encourage our residents to make healthier lifestyle choices, such as giving up smoking, exercising more, drinking alcohol sensibly and eating a healthier diet. We will support our residents to take care of their mental health as well as their physical health.

## **What we've already achieved:**

So Stevenage has been successful in tackling health issues in a variety of different ways. The Smokebusters project raised widespread awareness of the dangers of smoking and nearly 600 people pledged to stop smoking in their cars and homes. Many have used this as a platform to stop smoking all together. This not only has a huge impact on the health of those who have quit and their families, but also saves them a considerable amount of money. Those who are exposed to second hand smoke can develop asthma, breathing problems and even lung cancer. A reduction in the harm from second-hand smoke will see health improvements and reduce some of the burden on local health services. Similar schemes have been introduced in other Hertfordshire districts and it is anticipated that Smokebusters will be adopted county wide.

Healthy cooking classes in children's centres that encourage positive food choices and raise awareness of obesity are always over-subscribed. In addition, the Health and Wellbeing Partnership has a budget of £10,000, to support projects that encourage healthy lifestyles.

## **How things are at the moment:**

According to the 2013 Stevenage Health Profiles the health of Stevenage residents broadly compares with that of England overall. However there are several health indicators in which Stevenage compares poorly with the Hertfordshire and England averages. These include the adult smoking prevalence which at 27.6% is the highest in Hertfordshire and 7.6% above the England average. The prevalence of acute sexually transmitted disease is also more than the England and Hertfordshire average. On a more positive note there has been a decrease in the % of obese year six children which at 16.4 % is below the England average rate of 19.2%.

## **What you said:**

The 2013 Health profile states that 52.6% of adults stated that they undertook at least 150 minutes of physical activity a week. This is lower than the England average of 56%. In addition residents have told us that they don't know how to cook healthily for their family and believe that it is more expensive to cook from scratch.

### **Our priorities are to:**

- Encourage healthy lifestyle choices
- Support good mental health.

### **Encourage healthy lifestyle choices**

We want to build on our recent successes, continuing to help people to stop smoking and keep their homes and cars smoke free. SoStevenage will continue to promote smoking cessation services, as well as the highly successful Smokebusters project. We want to promote improved diet, good nutrition and active lifestyles raising greater awareness of healthy eating and tackling myths around the expense of cooking healthily for a family. We also recognise the huge importance of exercise for health and we want to encourage fitness and physical activity of all kinds, including making fitness classes more accessible. Again, it is important for us to celebrate our successes and promote opportunities for people to get involved.



### **Support good mental health**

The impact of unhealthy lifestyle choices are well known, the impact of mental health issues receives less recognition. We think it is important that there is more understanding and awareness of mental illness and recognise that we all have a role to play in reducing the stigma that comes with it. We want to do more to prevent mental health issues from developing and talk to users of mental health services, their carers and local agencies to strengthen the voice of those affected in Stevenage. We want to encourage those who are affected to come forward for the support and advice that is available.

We know that there are some groups who are more likely to suffer from mental health issues, such as isolated older people, carers, those with drug or alcohol problems and those with ongoing financial problems. We will use the partnership to give those with mental health issues and their carers a voice. We will inform, support and signpost residents to resources and organisations who can help.

Carers are hugely valuable for any community and often do not receive the praise and support they deserve. Stevenage is therefore proud to be the first Caring Borough in Hertfordshire. Partners are committed to actively helping carers, ensuring that carers know their rights and raising the profile of carers across Stevenage. Carers are entitled to a carer's passport, which provides them with discounts at a range of Stevenage shops.

# Healthy communities

Stevenage has always had strong and active communities. There are over 300 voluntary and community sector groups who play an active role in the town. Many residents participate in “Friends of” schemes and local groups and we want to build on this. It is really important that people in our communities can rely on each other, help each other out and feel safe and happy in their local environment. We have some fantastic green spaces and facilities in Stevenage, and we want to encourage people to look after them, enjoy them and feel safe in them.

## **What we've already achieved:**

SoStevenage has a good track record of working with a variety of partners to achieve our aims for the environment, for community safety and for volunteering. SoStevenage gave £25,000 to the Wild Stevenage project, helping to secure a successful £50,000 bid for Heritage Lottery Funding. This has enabled Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, working with the borough council, to deliver a number of activities to improve the local environment. A dedicated Wild Stevenage Officer was appointed to raise environmental awareness and encourage local people to get involved in improving green spaces. This is another excellent example of working co-operatively with the community, and volunteers dedicated over 300 hours to improving local grasslands and woodlands.

SoSafe, the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) for Stevenage, has made great progress in reducing crime and antisocial behaviour (ASB), with falling crime levels and the highest detection rates in the county in 2012. SoSafe is a strong and effective partnership, which is working to maintain this momentum.

The partnership supports many initiatives that help to reduce antisocial behaviour. This involves working with local partners like the YMCA to provide diversionary activities for young people, particularly around the holiday, Halloween and Christmas periods.

Stevenage has a busy night time economy, and SoSafe funds taxi marshals who help people to safely find a licensed taxi home after a night out.

SoStevenage also recognises that the voluntary and community sector is incredibly important to the life and vibrancy of the town and reserves ten spaces on the Board for voluntary sector representatives. SoStevenage has set aside £26,000 to promote and encourage volunteering in the town. It is however recognised that more can be done to encourage residents and businesses to get involved.

Over the last five years the council has provided £2.8 million in direct and indirect support to local groups. Last year Stevenage Borough Council councillors contributed their Local Community Budget funding of around £160,000 to community groups to help extend the range and quality of services they offer.



### **How things are at the moment:**

Over the last year, more than 900 people visited the Stevenage Volunteer Centre looking for volunteering opportunities. This shows that many local people want to get involved in their community. We surveyed 394 Stevenage businesses and 39% of them told us that they are already supporting the voluntary and community sector in some way. This equates to more than 180 different voluntary and community organisations being supported by 147 businesses. Approximately 29% of businesses release employees to volunteer and we want to capitalise on this and encourage more businesses to get involved locally.

Overall, crime in Stevenage fell by 11.2% between March 2012 and March 2013. Anti-social behaviour has fallen by 22% over the last year with a total of 3591 incidents in 2012/13, this compares to 4920 in 2011/12. However, domestic abuse continues to be a problem along with a country wide increase in violent incidents.

### **What you said:**

Many businesses in the town already release their employees to volunteer, or contribute to the sector in some way through corporate social responsibility activities. However, our survey highlighted that many businesses want to do more or get involved, but didn't know where to start. Many of the people come into the Stevenage Volunteer Centre each year keen to get involved but are unaware of the opportunities available. They often have the misconception that volunteering means dedicating many hours a week, not knowing that there are a wide variety of opportunities available.

There is still some fear of crime and anti-social behaviour in Stevenage, and 29% of respondents to the 2012 residents' survey told us that they felt unsafe in their local area after dark.

### **Our priorities:**

- Ensure clean and green spaces
- Help people feel safe
- Support and encourage volunteering

### **Ensure clean and green spaces**

We have some fantastic clean and green spaces in Stevenage, including two parks with Green Flag awards, woodlands, cycling tracks and a sailing lake at Fairland's Valley Park. We want to maintain the high quality spaces we have, and promote their use for a variety of activities, including exercise. We want to increase the involvement of local residents and community groups in actively managing the environment, and will look to create opportunities for people to get involved, such as "Friends of" schemes.

SoStevenage is keen to ensure that Stevenage residents have a strong sense of place and are committed to maintaining these spaces as a great legacy for future generations to enjoy and we will ensure that the council's Green Spaces' Strategy and the Biodiversity Action Plan are implemented to achieve this.

We also want to raise the profile of the climate change agenda and the impact of climate change on the town. To do this, we will seek to engage with the community and communicate what businesses, local agencies, residents and communities can do to help reduce their own carbon footprint, as well as working on reducing our own.







### **Help people feel safe**

Fear and perception of crime can often undermine the reality of low crime levels. Crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) are reducing overall in Stevenage, but we understand that fear can impact on people's feeling of safety. It is important to address the myths about crime. We want to continue to tackle anti-social behaviour by encouraging good behaviour and building respect between individuals and communities. We will address anti-social behaviour effectively and quickly. We will also continue to support implementation of the SoSafe community safety strategy and action plan.

We will also be stepping up our action to focus on raising awareness of domestic abuse across Stevenage. The Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse action group will implement an action plan, focussing on partnership work to break the cycle of abuse that often continues within families. We will also employ a Domestic Abuse Coordinator to unite local partners – this role will be the first of its kind in Hertfordshire employed by a District Council.

### **Support and encourage volunteering**

We know that volunteering is incredibly important to sustain the voluntary and community sector in Stevenage. The partnership will seek to promote volunteering to residents and encourage people to get involved. We will work with the sector to develop appropriate voluntary placements. We want to promote and support volunteering and volunteers, and celebrate the successes of businesses that actively pursue their corporate social responsibility.

It is important for our town to have cohesive communities, living and evolving in harmony. Cohesion can be increased when people feel safe and enjoy strong and positive relationships with others. It is also important that individuals can confidently contribute to their community through active citizenship, participation in volunteering and local decision-making.

# Integration of the Community Strategy with other key plans and strategies



The SoStevenage community strategy has been prepared in the context of other key local plans and strategies, including those of our partners across the town. It is important that we recognise the priorities of other organisations and work together to achieve our joint aims for Stevenage.

# How will we measure our progress?

The vision and objectives within this strategy will be delivered through a detailed action plan, presenting a clear work programme for all members of SoStevenage.

To ensure we deliver our objectives, it is important that we monitor our activity. The partnership will ensure the strategy has measurable actions and activities with SMART targets and milestones that are monitored each quarter.

## Equality, Diversity and Governance

An Equality Impact Assessment informed the development of this plan. The assessment has considered how different minority groups may be affected by our aims. These groups are protected under the Equality Act 2010. We want to ensure that residents with protected characteristics have the opportunity to achieve the same outcomes as everyone else and share the expected dividends.

To continue to ensure that SoStevenage understands the needs of all our different communities, the partnership will use Census and local data to inform the yearly action plans to deliver the community strategy.



# SoStevenage Members 2012-13

Stevenage Football Club
Viewpoint / Mind Wellbeing Centre / Stevenage Mental Health Partnership
Social Inclusion Partnership and Stevenage CVS
Pro-Action Hertfordshire
Stevenage Extended Services Forum, Nobel School
Stevenage Learning Partnership and North Hertfordshire College
Hertfordshire County Council
Stevenage Rotary Club
The Comet
Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue
Neighbourhood Champion
Third Thursday
Sport Stevenage
Stevenage Borough Council
Stevenage Leisure Limited
Stevenage World Forum for Ethnic Communities
Stevenage Citizens Advice Bureau
Ahmaddiyya Muslim Association UK
The Advertiser
Churches Together
HR Initiatives
Odyssey Gym
Health and Wellbeing Forum
Hertfordshire Constabulary
Stevenage 14-19 Partnership
YMCA Central Hertfordshire
East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust
Groundwork Hertfordshire
MBA Association
Westgate Shopping Centre
Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Business Advisory Group