



**Annual Report**

**2013**

## Introduction

**This report details the work delivered by the SoStevenage partnership and the partner organisations involved during 2012/13. SoStevenage is a partnership of local organisations working together to make the town a better place to live. Partners include Stevenage Borough Council, Hertfordshire Constabulary, NHS, Hertfordshire County Council, Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, voluntary and community sector groups and representatives from the business community.**

SoStevenage had another very successful year, delivering a wide range of improvements for the town. SoStevenage focused on complex issues that needed a co-ordinated solution involving a range of partners. These include domestic violence, antisocial behaviour, economic support, obesity and smoking. SoStevenage's primary aim is to tackle these issues in partnership in order to make Stevenage an even better place to live, work and visit.

This report provides a snapshot of activity and is not a comprehensive picture of all the excellent partnership work that is underway. For more detailed information on the work of SoStevenage please visit [www.stevenage.gov.uk/about-the-council/so-stevenage](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/about-the-council/so-stevenage) or email [sostevenage@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:sostevenage@stevenage.gov.uk).

# Stevenage's community strategy

The community strategy is the main strategic document that shapes the work of SoStevenage. This annual report outlines how the partnership has performed against the priorities from the 2007-2012 community strategy. These are:

- **safer stronger communities**
  - reduce antisocial behaviour
  - reduce the fear of crime
  - tackle violent crime in the home and alcohol-related disorder
  - value volunteers
  - empower communities and increase community cohesion
  - make culture, sport and leisure more accessible
  - develop affordable homes
- **children and young people**
  - help children and young people achieve their potential at all ages
  - help children and young people have good things to do and places to go
  - involve children and young people in decision making
  - safeguard children and young people and promote their health and wellbeing
- **healthier communities and older people**
  - create healthier lifestyles and ensure access to quality health care services
  - create opportunities for older people
  - ensure access to quality health care services
- **economic development and the environment**
  - increase the range of employment opportunities
  - regenerate the town centre and the neighbourhood centres
  - create cleaner and greener communities and provide better transport
  - make a town wide commitment to halt climate change
  - provide a better image for the town - "Stevenage: a great place to be"

We are currently developing the 2013-18 Stevenage community strategy. Residents helped to shape the new strategy by telling us their views at Café Choice, a consultation event, in the town centre on 15 December 2012. We will begin implementing this strategy from April 2013.

## Co-operative council

**Stevenage Borough Council is committed to working co-operatively with residents and partners. This means:**

- we're here when you need us
- we can all work together to support each other
- you can play a part
- we all understand each other
- we're all working together for each other and for our town

This is by no means a new approach for Stevenage and there are many examples of this co-operative way of working across the town and throughout its history. The current financial climate has placed increasing pressure on public services and it is therefore all the more important to maintain and develop our co-operative focus. Stevenage Borough Council will continue to take a co-operative approach and work with the community to keep improving the town and to share the dividends.





## Stevenage overview

**Stevenage has a population of 84,000 people and has 41,400 jobs and 35,000 dwellings. It has a population density of 32.36 people per hectare, far higher than the Hertfordshire average of 6.79.**

There is a mixed workforce, with technology and pharmaceuticals being the main employment sectors. The local employment profile shows that there are high proportions of Stevenage residents employed in management (17.4% compared to the regional average of 11.1%) and in skilled trades (14.1% compared to the regional average of 11.3%).

GCSE results are below both the England and Hertfordshire average, although they have improved since 2010. In 2011, 74.9% of Stevenage students achieved 5 A\* to C grades (up from 71.6% in 2010), compared with the county average of 83.5% and the England average of 80.1%.

Crime figures have been improving over the last three years with a significant decrease in antisocial behaviour, criminal damage, vehicle crime and theft.

Stevenage is ranked 173 out of 354 English districts on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, but there are significant differences at ward level. Bedwell is one of the most deprived areas in the country, whilst the wards of Woodfield and Manor are amongst the least deprived.

The 2012 Health Profile shows Stevenage has some of the poorest health indicators in the county and a number of health indicators are worse than the national average.

At 28.9%, Stevenage has a much higher ratio of social rented to private housing than most local authorities - 8,286 council homes, 1,960 housing association, and 25,248 private sector. The council housing waiting list stands at 7,579 and there is a need for 581 new social housing units each year to meet demand. However, land in the town is scarce and cannot support this scale of development.

## SoStevenage's achievements

### Safer stronger communities

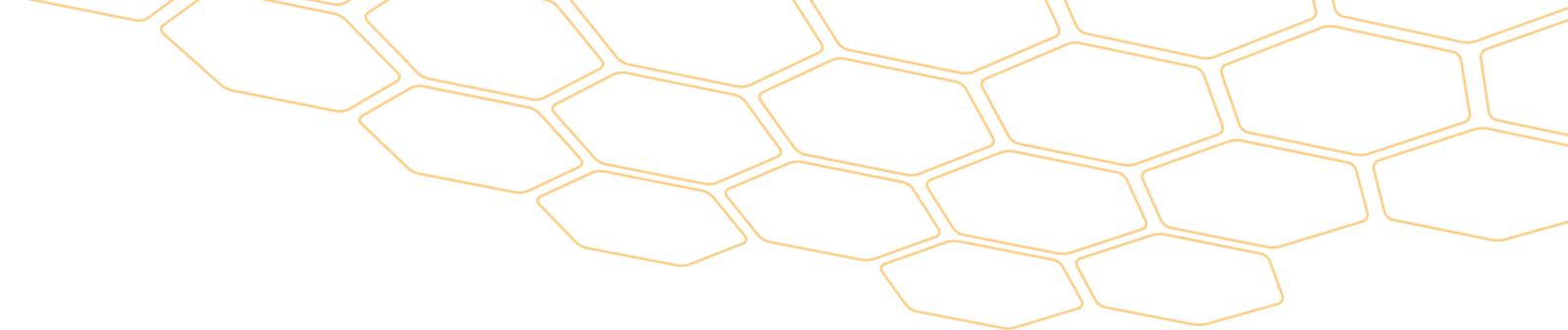
#### What were our aims?

- reduce antisocial behaviour
- reduce the fear of crime
- tackle violent crime in the home and alcohol related disorder
- value volunteers
- empower communities and increase community cohesion
- make culture, sport and leisure more accessible
- develop affordable homes

#### What did we do?

##### Reduced antisocial behaviour

- Antisocial behaviour (ASB) has reduced by 23% in Stevenage since July 2011.
- Operation Sabre has successfully prevented and reduced seasonal ASB and incidents of deliberate fires. Officers from Stevenage fire station used four partnership funded bicycles for high visibility patrols around the town. On many occasions, these patrols have been successfully run in partnership with Safer Neighbourhood Police teams.
- Stevenage's Family Intervention Project helped to reduce the number of families who lost their homes because of ASB. Since the project began, there has been a significant drop in reports of nuisance from those families involved. The project's focus on prevention has also saved lots of money across different agencies.
- Box Cleva has helped young people who were at risk of taking part in ASB. It is a non contact physical training programme which focuses on respect, discipline and healthy living. All the children who have attended so far have responded extremely well and are making progress in positively changing their behaviour.
- The Nacro XS project has discouraged ASB among young people 'hanging around'. Instead, young people have taken part in organised activities like basketball, football and computer games because of encouragement from youth workers, and have been signposted to other activities across the town.



## Reduced the fear of crime

- The Taxi Marshall scheme has helped to increase people's feelings of safety, positively promoted the night time economy and increased the safety of drivers. It has also ensured safe passage for vulnerable members of the public who may be under the influence of alcohol.
- Environmental Action Days have provided the residents involved with an opportunity to engage with community safety organisations and gain a visible improvement in their immediate neighbourhoods.
- The SoSafe Newsletter was sent out to residents to inform them about topical community safety issues and provide advice to help them be safer and feel safer.

## Tackled violent crime in the home and alcohol related disorder

- The 'Prince Charming' interactive theatre production taught 400 young people in Stevenage about recognising domestic abuse. The young people and schools responded positively to the production. A film and education pack based on the theatre production was distributed to schools and other partners, and was uploaded to YouTube.
- A domestic abuse conference in November strengthened partnership working and launched an action group for Stevenage to find long-term solutions to domestic abuse in the town. It focussed on early intervention and family based solutions.
- The No More Project helped to reduce alcoholism, and the problems it causes, for its participants. The project was initiated because of known issues with street drinkers. It has reduced ASB and criminal activity, prevented homelessness, reduced street drinking, improved health and improved family relationships. It has also saved a large amount of money for many partners. It has achieved this by providing intensive support and focused challenge to high need individuals and their families, where there are issues of alcohol misuse.
- Operation Advisory raised awareness of the dangers associated with excess alcohol consumption, and how it can make people vulnerable to sexual attack. Police officers in the main night-time economy areas gave out information leaflets and anti-drink spiking bottle tops, and provided advice to the public.

## Valued volunteers

- Stevenage Borough Council worked with volunteers from North Hertfordshire College and Stevenage Police to run a youth club at the Hyde which is open one night per week. The club has proved to be a very useful way of engaging with often hard to reach children. Volunteers from the college provided mentoring for the children involved and signposted them to other agencies and activities.
- Stevenage Borough Council created a range of volunteering opportunities through the green space volunteers initiative. The volunteers have helped with woodland management, ecological surveys, improvements to ponds and installation of bird and bat boxes.
- Volunteers have delivered actions from the council's biodiversity action plan.
- The partnership surveyed the voluntary sector to find out how volunteering can lead to employability.

## Empowered communities and increased community cohesion

- Stevenage Day was very successful again this year. The day raised funds for local charities and raised awareness of, and celebrated, the work of local societies in Stevenage. Local charitable organisations provided entertainment and other partners provided information and advice to residents.
- Stevenage Borough Council Councillors used their local budgets (local community budgets) to distribute around £200,000 to community groups and to help extend the range and quality of services they offer.
- Stevenage Borough Council's Neighbourhood Development Team supported community groups and organisations who work with specific communities in Stevenage, such as the Irish Network and disability groups.
- SoStevenage partners supported the Red Card to Racism football competition to help tackle racism and improve community cohesion.
- The Stevenage Interfaith Group held an event in November during Interfaith Week to raise awareness of different faiths. It was very well attended by faith representatives. Councillors and members of the public were also able to attend.



- The Money, Money, Money project has helped to give Stevenage residents more support in managing their money and has also raised awareness of the Stevenage Credit Union. The Citizens Advice Bureau has been able to help more people deal with debt cases and has particularly targeted young families, young people, older people, people with mental health problems and those from black and minority ethnic groups.

### **Made culture, sport and leisure more accessible**

- SoStevenage allocated £132,249 to build a high ropes course in Fairlands Valley Park. The course provides a unique and challenging community outdoor adventure space and will be a lasting, accessible legacy in the town.
- Fairlands Valley Park held an open day to promote the facilities in the park, and the leisure opportunities for visitors of all ages.
- The sports pitches at Ridlins End Playing Fields were improved.
- A range of improvements were made to the town's allotment sites in partnership with the Stevenage Gardens and Allotments Association.
- Partners worked together to deliver Olympic sport-related taster sessions.

### **Developed affordable homes**

- The council's housing advice and homelessness team worked closely with partner organisations such as the CAB and Hertfordshire Young Homeless to try and prevent homelessness. A number of interventions, including on the spot assistance in the County Court for tenants and home owners facing repossession, were used. In the financial year 2011/ 2012, these interventions prevented homelessness for 360 households that approached the council or its partners for assistance. During 2011/12 an additional 52 affordable homes were completed in Stevenage. This figure includes 42 new-build social rented homes.

## Children and young people

### What were our aims?

- help children and young people achieve their potential at all ages
- help children and young people have good things to do and places to go
- involve children and young people in decision making
- safeguard children and young people and promote their health and wellbeing

### What did we do?

#### Helped children and young people achieve their potential at all ages

- The Ventures project has encouraged entrepreneurship in young people, especially those not in education, employment or training. The young people involved with the project received training and skills, mentoring from business leaders and offers of work placements.
- The North Hertfordshire Children's University was launched and provided additional learning opportunities for 7 to 14 year olds outside of school.
- School children attended programmes offered at North Hertfordshire College. Subjects included animation, dance and cookery.
- North Hertfordshire College delivered a range of family learning programmes to parents and their children.

#### Helped children and young people have good things to do and places to go

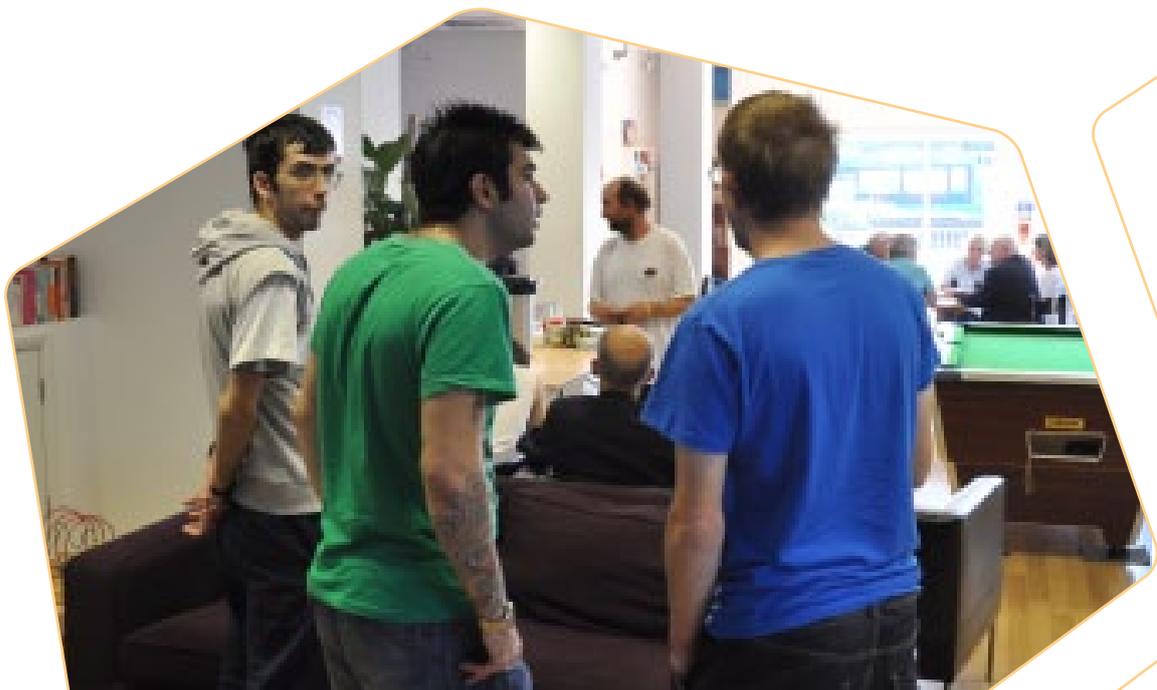
- A youth and community café, YMCA Space, was established with support from SoStevenage. The café has provided information for young people about learning and volunteering opportunities, and has directed people to additional services as required. Young people have also attended sessions run by a youth worker covering topics like sexual health, healthy eating and CV/job skills.
- The community café, POD 53, was launched in December providing a place for young people and other residents to meet, volunteer and develop their musical interests into business opportunities. More initiatives are planned for POD 53 for 2013 and it is hoped that it will continue to develop as a community facility.

## **Involved children and young people in decision making**

- The first Youth Mayor of Stevenage was elected by Stevenage Youth Council in 2012, giving young people a greater voice in decision making. The Youth Mayor attended council meetings and civic events and directed the expenditure of a local youth budget of £3,300.
- Stevenage Borough Council's ASB team set up a youth forum involving children and young people who are known to the police. The forum helps children to understand the consequences of their attitudes and facilitates change to their behaviour.

## **Safeguarded children and young people and promoted their health and well being**

- The Go5 project encouraged parents and year five pupils to be more active and aware of healthy lifestyles. The project has helped contribute to children losing weight by the time they reach year six.
- The two-day Early Years Nutrition Training programme for children's centre staff provided practical information to help them advise parents and carers of children under five years old. The course enabled staff to provide parent workshops and respond better to parents regarding concerns about child nutrition.
- The Eat Better Start Better pilot programme improved food provision for children in early years. It ran a nutrition and cooking training package enabling children's centres to offer healthy eating cookery clubs.



## Healthier communities and older people

### What were our aims?

- create healthier lifestyles and ensure access to quality health care services
- create opportunities for older people
- ensure access to quality health care services

### What did we do?

#### Created healthier lifestyles and ensured access to quality health care services

- In 2011-12 the target set for four-week smoking quitters (number of smokers who had quit at four-week follow up with NHS smoking cessation services) was exceeded by 28%. This is the best achievement in the county and Stevenage is on course to achieve its target of 685 four-week quitters in 2012-13. Smokebusters increased the number of Stevenage families living in smoke free-homes. SoStevenage signposted smokers wanting to quit to their local NHS stop smoking support service.
- Over 200 people aged 31–82 have benefitted from the local exercise referral scheme, whereby clients take their signed GP referral forms to Stevenage Leisure Limited and arrange a consultation. Appropriate activity is planned depending on the client's health problem.
- The health and well-being partnership supported the Stevenage Wellbeing Centre to promote World Mental Health Day. The centre opened its doors to all residents, invited local businesses to attend and provided a day of fun and taster sessions.



### **Created opportunities for older people**

- The Stevenage Seniors Forum met during the year and helped to represent older people's views on public service provision and older people's issues. The forum is an umbrella group for the Stevenage voluntary and community sector to help establish priorities for older communities and residents.
- The '50+ News and Views' newsletter was produced quarterly and improved communication between public agencies, the voluntary and community sector and older people across Stevenage.
- Stevenage Borough Council supported the development of voluntary sector organisations that deliver older people's services. The council worked with these organisations to access funding, build infrastructure, develop sustainable services, help management committees provide strong governance, set clear policies and carry out consultations.

## **Economic development and the environment**

### **What were our aims?**

- **increase the range of employment opportunities**
- **regenerate the town centre and the neighbourhood centres**
- **create cleaner and greener communities and provide better transport**
- **make a town wide commitment to halt climate change**
- **provide a better image for the town - “Stevenage: A Great Place to Be”**

### **What did we do?**

#### **Increased the range of employment opportunities**

- In October, the Duke of Edinburgh opened the Business Technology Centre’s Incubation Centre.
- Stevenage Borough Council worked with local commercial agents and businesses to undertake an inward investment campaign that has and is attracting new businesses and creating new jobs for Stevenage residents.
- Stevenage Borough Council, North Hertfordshire College and local businesses worked together to provide an annual Jobs and Skills Fair supporting unemployed people, young people, job seekers and local businesses.
- Stevenage Borough Council provided a local business directory, a commercial property list, test trade grants and other schemes to support local businesses.
- The council provided business support events during the year on procurement, skills, investment and other themed topics.
- North Hertfordshire College delivered an enterprise programme in conjunction with JobCentrePlus where clients explored enterprise and worked as a team to develop products and services to sell.
- North Hertfordshire College ran an Adult Enterprise provision to support adults wishing to set up their own business.

- North Hertfordshire College offered business training to employers through seminars, workplace training and apprenticeships. It provided supported advice, business training and employability support to adults with disabilities.
- Work experience placements were provided for North Hertfordshire College students in the Town Centre Gardens.

### **Regenerated the town centre and the neighbourhood centres**

- The public areas at the Hyde, the Glebe and Burwell Road Neighbourhood Centres were regenerated during 2010-2012. Improvements have been made to the town, including the public realm at the gateway to the town from the leisure centre. Stevenage Borough Council continues to work to provide a comprehensive redevelopment scheme for the town centre.

### **Created cleaner and greener communities and provided better transport**

- Stevenage is pleased to have retained its Green Flag Award for Fairlands Valley Park for the third year running and a Green Flag for the Town Centre Gardens for the second year.
- The kerbside recycling service was expanded to include plastic pots, tubs and trays. There is now a comprehensive kerbside recycling service which saves raw material, landfill space and reduces energy requirements to produce new, recycled goods.
- The partnership has supported residents in looking after the environment. For example, through wildlife related tips and articles in Chronicle.
- SoStevenage gave £25,000 to the Wild Stevenage project. Many successful initiatives took place as a result of the project:
  - Scouts tidied up ponds with residents to increase biodiversity
  - Shackledell habitat improvement work was carried out by a group of 57 volunteers
  - Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and the North Hertfordshire Ramblers Group delivered an educational campaign to promote healthy walking within Stevenage's green spaces.
- Partners worked with Hertfordshire County Council on an active travel strategy for the county to ensure it recognises Stevenage's needs. Partners have been developing transport plans for their employees and encouraging greener travel.

## Made a town-wide commitment to halt climate change

- Kerbside recycling collection rates have increased from 39% to 42% in the last 12 months.
- The role of Stevenage Borough Council's climate action and sustainability team has been extended to become the council's co-ordinating body for sustainability issues, both within the council and for developing initiatives across the town.
- An eco schools network was introduced (part of the international Eco Schools scheme dedicated to getting pupils involved in helping their school run in an environmentally conscious way) and won an award for innovation.

## Provided a better image for the town - "Stevenage: a great place to be"

- Her Majesty the Queen visited the town this year as part of her tour of the country to mark her Diamond Jubilee year. Stevenage also joined in the lighting of the beacons across the country in honour of Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee.
- The Olympic torch travelled through the town on its way to the Olympic venue for the start of the 2012 games.
- The Pride of Stevenage Awards were held to recognise and reward local heroes. The 2012 awards were announced at a glittering reception in October, hosted by the Mayor Cllr John Lloyd, and winners were presented with trophies and prizes.



## **2012's winners were:**

### **SoVoluntary - David Wall**

David has given 25 years of voluntary service to Stevenage communities and charities. He has carried out unpaid work and activities that benefit individuals and organisations in the town with warmth, dedication, selflessness, leadership, expertise, and unwavering commitment.

### **SoCaring - Carers' Café Group**

The Carers' Café Group, at Crossroads Care day centre, gives full time carers a break from their caring responsibilities. Going to the café gives group members the chance to meet, chat and share information with their fellow carers.

### **SoSporting - Gobi Ranganathan**

Gobi is the UK's number one disabled badminton champion. This summer he was one of the influential people chosen to carry the Olympic torch as it travelled through Stevenage en-route to London 2012. As well as competing and working, Gobi takes time out to visit schools, sharing his experiences about badminton and being a disabled sportsman.

### **SoSharing - Shephall youth drop in**

Social sessions for young people take place at The Hyde each Friday evening. They started after young people in the neighbourhood told local councillors and police officers that they would like safe, indoor activities near their homes. The initiative means anyone between the ages of 11 and 19 can drop in and socialise in a safe environment.

### **SoGreen - Friends of the Town Centre Gardens and supporters**

The Friends design, plant and maintain one of the seasonal bedding displays in the Town Centre Gardens, and adult learners from North Hertfordshire College help to keep the Gardens looking colourful and interesting. The Friends also help with maintenance of other areas of the gardens, and assist in the delivery of a number of events and activities enjoyed by Stevenage residents and visitors.

### **SoBrave - Corinne Headington**

Corinne cares for her husband who was diagnosed in 1996 with schizophrenia, and she has demonstrated considerable bravery to overcome her fear of public speaking, recounting her personal experience to help others cope.

### **SoFriendly - Carol Hardy**

Carol has spent many years making her neighbourhood a great place to live. She helps out many of her neighbours by cooking for them, visiting, knitting and regularly calling to make sure they are okay. Carol is consistently kind, considerate, generous, warm and giving to so many others.

### **Special award – SoProud – Marian Hurle**

The judges' special award, SoProud, went to Marian Hurle, director of Stevenage Citizens Advice Bureau, who has worked tirelessly for many years to help people facing all kinds of problems including homelessness and debt. The judges described Marian as 'a real community leader and an asset to Stevenage'.



## Final word

This report showcases some of the fantastic work that SoStevenage has done to improve the quality of life for people in Stevenage. The partnership will be building on many of these examples of co-operative working to further develop our approach over the coming year. Working co-operatively is central to the ethos of SoStevenage and we will do all we can to work together as a partnership and with the communities and residents of Stevenage to make the town an even better place to live, work and visit.

We are currently developing a new community strategy for 2013-18 and look forward to working in partnership to achieve its objectives over the next five years.

**S**ostenenage

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