



ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 1 September 2025

Time: 6.00pm,

Location: Council Chamber

Contact: Alex Marsh (01438) 242587

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Members: Councillors: L Brady (Chair), A McGuinness (Vice-Chair), R Boyle, J Brown, F Chowdhury, A Gordon, C Parris, C Roopchand, A Wells, P Wilkins and J Woods

AGENDA

PART 1

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MINUTES - 11 JUNE 2025

To receive the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Select Committee, held on 11 June 2025 and agree them as a correct record.

3 – 8

3. OFFICER PRESENTATION - WASTE & RECYCLING FROM RESIDENTIAL COUNCIL FLAT BLOCKS

To receive a presentation from Stevenage Direct Services Officers regarding the collection of waste and recycling from SBC residential blocks.

(Presentation to follow)

4. NOTES OF SITE VISIT TO SBC LOW RISE RESIDENTIAL FLAT BLOCKS

To receive Notes of the Member site visit to Council low rise residential flat blocks which was carried out on Monday 21 July 2025.

9 – 10

5. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

To consider any Part 1 business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

6. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

To consider the following motions –

1. That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be

excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

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

7. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

To consider any Part II business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 11 June 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Leanne Brady (Chair), Andy McGuinness (Vice Chair), Robert Boyle, Jim Brown, Forhad Chowdhury, Alistair Gordon and Peter Wilkins

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.10pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Parris and Councillor Woods.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS - 27 FEBRUARY, 11 MARCH & 20 MARCH 2025**

The Minutes of the Audit Committee meetings held on 27 February, 11 March and 20 March 2025 were approved and signed by the Chair.

3 **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Terms of Reference as agreed at Annual Council on 22 May 2025 were noted.

4 **CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDER AND EXTERNAL PARTNER RESPONSE TO THE SKILLS AGENDA REVIEW**

The Committee received the Cabinet Portfolio Holder and External Partner responses to the Skills Agenda review, a major piece of work completed the previous year.

The Chair noted that the full set of responses had been circulated and chose to highlight specific points for discussion.

Members welcomed the proposed expansion of Stevenage Works under **Recommendation 1**, particularly with respect to green construction and technologies such as solar and air source heat pumps. They cited the importance of the programme in tackling climate change and supporting local employment and apprenticeships. A Member commented that a major development at Bell Homes had not included a Stevenage Works contribution and asked that all future developments be required to make such contributions.

A Member commented on **Recommendation 3**, acknowledging the importance of training individuals in childcare but highlighted a lack of local nurseries in which such individuals could work. They emphasised the need for infrastructure to match the training provision and recalled a historic commitment by the Council regarding childcare facilities. The Chair confirmed that the lack of formal nursery provision in Stevenage had been acknowledged during the review, with much childcare being delivered through informal means such as childminders.

The Chair commented regarding **Recommendation 5**, which referenced work experience placements through Generation Stevenage involving four local schools. Clarification was sought as to why those particular schools were selected and whether other schools had been given the opportunity to participate.

A query was raised by a Member regarding **Recommendation 10**, which mentioned future employment opportunities linked to increased defence sector funding. The Member questioned whether jobs could legally be ringfenced for Stevenage residents, citing concern about skilled jobs being filled by non-residents. The Chair acknowledged that this issue had been raised during the review and noted the challenges in ensuring local recruitment, particularly where recruitment is managed by external agencies. Although the legality of ringfencing was uncertain, the Committee agreed that encouraging local recruitment should be a key message to employers.

The Chair shared formal feedback from the Portfolio Holder, who expressed his appreciation to Committee Members and particularly to the Council's Corporate Policy and Performance Manager for their work on the Skills Agenda. The Portfolio Holder welcomed Cabinet's positive endorsement of the review's findings and emphasised the importance of addressing the local skills gap, especially in relation to green jobs. They hoped that Stevenage Works could be expanded to address the issues identified.

5 **ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2025-26**

The Committee reviewed the draft Work Programme for the 2025–26 municipal year. It was noted that a key area of focus, raised by members in the previous year, would be waste and recycling, particularly in relation to flat blocks. The programme included a proposed site visit scheduled for 21 July, intended to compare a high-performing block with one facing recycling challenges. Members agreed to proceed with this approach.

In response to a query about the inclusion of private blocks, Officers confirmed that the review would initially focus on council-owned blocks, over which the Council had operational control. However, efforts would be made to engage with private landlords and managing agents to promote best practice. It was noted that once improvements were successfully implemented in council blocks, these could be used to influence expectations across the private sector.

The Committee discussed the rationale for focusing on flats separately from houses,

with Officers explaining that many blocks lacked lift access, creating logistical challenges for residents in handling bins. A prototype three-wheeled bin, developed in-house, was being trialled to address those issues and it was hoped that in due course this would be demonstrated to Members.

A Member raised the point that waste and recycling systems should be consistent across the borough regardless of tenure, especially given the prospect of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the potential for a unitary authority in the future. This could lead to a more standardised approach to waste collection across a wider area.

It was emphasised by several Members that the Committee's work should prioritise waste reduction, not solely increasing recycling rates. Officers agreed, noting that this linked directly to the Council's broader work on tackling the climate emergency, and that waste management was a key contributor to carbon emissions.

The Committee endorsed waste and recycling as a major theme for the year. It was noted that related work on the Climate Emergency would be reviewed at meetings in November and March, with officer presentations planned.

Another area of focus would be fly-tipping, which members agreed was an ongoing concern. Officers confirmed that relevant Portfolio Holders and Officers would attend to support this work. A member emphasised the need for stronger enforcement as a core component in addressing the issue effectively. This was acknowledged and supported by the Chair.

The committee discussed plans to scrutinise active travel and transport accessibility later in the year, with a focus on Beryl bike usage, disability access, and transport hubs. Comments were made about diluting the topic by adding unrelated issues like car parking, though it was agreed that parking data was relevant to understanding transport behaviours. Members emphasised the need for better accessibility infrastructure, such as dropped kerbs, and highlighted the importance of partnership with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) on these matters. The review would aim to balance promoting active travel with ensuring inclusivity.

The committee confirmed a forthcoming review of green space strategies, including visits to sites such as Stanborough Lakes and Fairlands Valley Park. This would support deeper scrutiny of parks and open space management.

Members agreed the overall scrutiny programme for the year was comprehensive.

6 DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENT - WASTE & RECYCLING IN FLATS BLOCKS REVIEW

The Chair opened the discussion by referring members to the scoping document, noting that the topic had previously been touched upon and now warranted a dedicated focus. The Chair reiterated that Waste and Recycling in Flat Blocks had been identified as a key concern due to the increasing number of such developments in Stevenage.

The Chair highlighted that the review would include site visits, a presentation already delivered earlier in the year, comparative analysis, and engagement with officers. There was also potential for participation from officers at Dacorum Borough Council to provide external insight, given their prior experience in similar initiatives.

The Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the Bring Bank sites would be included in upcoming site visits scheduled for 21 July 2025.

The Chair summarised the projected timeline: continuation of site visits, a potential ride-along to the depot (pending arrangements), and a series of officer presentations and witness interviews and evidence gathering through September, October, and November, culminating in a final report and recommendations by the end of the year.

A Member commented on the issue of building height, noting the differences in recycling capacity between low-rise social blocks and higher-density private blocks. The Chair agreed that higher-rise blocks should be included in the site visits.

Members discussed the value of capturing tenant voices, proposing resident surveys as part of the evidence-gathering process.

A Member requested data on the Council's own waste from events and public spaces (e.g. Stevenage Day), commenting that waste appeared not to be segregated. The Chair suggested these points be raised with relevant officers.

A Member proposed more recycling bins in public areas such as parks and footpaths. They also shared a positive example of temporary recycling support provided during Ramadan at the Stevenage Muslim Community Centre.

A Member suggested including an audit of recycling practices within the Council's own buildings.

The Vice-Chair cautioned against allowing the review to broaden excessively and lose focus. While recognising the value of related points, they urged the Committee to remain aligned with the agreed scope.

In response, some Members asserted that many of those concerns were raised at the outset but not captured in the original scoping. The Chair and Scrutiny Officer acknowledged this and noted the importance of balancing focus with flexibility.

The Scrutiny Officer clarified that while the main review focus must remain on flat blocks—due to their pressing challenges—there was room within the scope to include related data and insights where relevant. Officers welcomed the review as an opportunity to drive improvements in an area they openly acknowledged as underperforming.

The Chair reiterated the importance of maintaining a targeted focus on flat blocks while recognising the validity of broader waste and recycling concerns.

The Committee agreed to proceed with the current scoping document,

The Committee expressed provisional satisfaction with the scoping document for the review on waste and recycling in flat blocks and agreed to move forward with the planned programme of site visits, officer presentations, and resident engagement with the understanding that related concerns may be raised again in future reviews.

7 ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE ACTION TRACKER 2025

The Chair opened the item by noting the need to tidy and focus the tracker to ensure the committee's limited time and resources are used effectively.

The Chair proposed removing legacy or outdated items unlikely to be revisited, and encouraged a practical, outcome-driven approach to scrutiny.

The Scrutiny Officer provided context on the climate emergency review, which had been a major undertaking in a previous cycle. Although climate change was an ongoing issue, scrutiny work must be clearly scoped and time limited.

Two key scrutiny sessions were proposed:

November 2025: Review of the Council's annual climate progress report.

March 2026: A thematic deep dive, the focus of this was yet to be determined.

The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation) offered to support members in shaping the March session topic through offline conversations.

Members commented on the value of revisiting areas already covered in full Council. It was clarified that scrutiny sessions would provide a more detailed and focused analysis, separate from broader council discussions.

The Chair proposed removing tracker items which were no longer actionable or relevant, including:

- COVID-19 economic impact
- Neighbourhood centres
- Post Office provision

Members supported streamlining the tracker to ensure focus on matters within the Council's remit.

Speaker 3 commented about a legacy recommendation related to locating EV chargers near cycleways, citing safety issues.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the recommendation was made in 2021 and would be reviewed for its evidence base before any amendment.

Members agreed the indoor market did not require a full scrutiny project due to ongoing developments but would benefit from a brief update.

Members agreed for the rail station update to remain on the tracker, but to be condensed, as progress was already underway and known to members.

The Chair proposed removing the Post Office item, given the council's lack of power over such provisions.

A Member commented on this, noting recent failures to provide a post office in the Old Town and highlighting the lack of local banking services, which negatively affected residents and businesses reliant on cash.

The Chair reiterated that such issues may fall under the Community Scrutiny Committee's remit, not this committee.

The Vice-Chair strongly advocated for focusing scrutiny only on areas where the Council had direct influence, cautioning against using limited resources on items with no practical outcome.

A Member responded that the Council could still act as a facilitator or advocate, citing examples from other local authorities that supported cooperative banking models. The Chair acknowledged this and suggested it could be reconsidered as a future item, potentially as part of next year's work planning.

The Chair confirmed that the tracker would be updated accordingly and thanked members for their contributions.

8 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

9 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Not required.

10 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR

Notes from Environment & Economy Select Committee site visit to look at recycling in various low rise flat blocks – 5pm Monday 21 July 2025

CSC Members Present:

Chair, Cllr Leanne Brady, Cllr Alistair Gordon, Cllr Forhad Chowdhury, Cllr Jim Brown and Cllr Peter Wilkins.

Officers Present:

Kris White, Stevenage Direct Services & Stephen Weaver, Scrutiny Officer.

Members attended a site visit to 4 low flat blocks at the following sites:

- 189-199 Vardon Road
- 11-77 Douglas Drive
- 64-70 Derby Way
- 71-77 Sefton Road

Members made the following observations:

Vardon Road

The proposed area suggested by SDS officers is in the car park close to the Vardon Road flats. It was suggested that the parking bay closest to the steps would be required to create a bin store area. It was noted that there is no lighting close to this area. There are a number of steps from the communal garden up to the proposed bin store area, which it was felt could cause difficulties for anyone with mobility issues. There could be a potential for complaints from neighbouring properties due to smells in the summer.

Douglas Drive

This area is very close to the Vardon Road flats. Other than in front of the Douglas Drive Day centre building, which has a large pedestrian paved area there are no obvious areas for a bin store for these flats. The pedestrian paved area would be problematic as the houses opposite would overlook a bin store so this would be a loss of visual amenity unless the whole area could be enhanced with a sympathetic bin store area created, screened by planting etc. These flats have a steep set of steps from the communal garden which houses the current bin store. Currently the Refuse and recycling operatives manually carry plastic sacks with all waste and no recycling from the communal bin store up the steps to the nearest.

Derby Way

The flats at Derby Way have a set of steps leading to a gated access/exit leading to a car parking area, the steps at this location are not as steep as those in Vardon Road and Derby Way sites. It is proposed that a bin store area could be created into the bank which would require the shrubs in the current location being removed and replaced with a purpose-built bin store area.

Sefton Road

The flats at Sefton Way have a ramp built in from the communal garden area up to the gate access/exit leading to a car parking area. There are currently 4 or 5 large wheely bins for communal recycling. There could be capacity for a few more bins if the current space is at capacity.

Bring Bank Site at the Oval Shops

There are issues with fly-tipping at these sites. The sites are placed to assist residents in flat blocks above the shops who have no capacity to recycle. The fly tipping is in part from commercial premises nearby who leave tubs of used cooking oil. Officers indicated that they are considering having two large sites in the town to complement the recycling offer at the County Council's recycling centre. The sites are cleared 3 times a week by SDS recycling operatives.

Members discussed the use of CCTV to monitor the fly tipping issues and whether this could be assisted by AI technology to target potential fly tipping abusers. It was noted that the deterrent of a £400 fine does not appear to be working.

Other issues raised by Members

Whatever offer officers consult on they will need to be simple and attractive to residents to encourage them to take part in any new recycling schemes. In time a recycling champion/lead resident at each block could be established to help encourage other residents to use the new scheme. In areas like Douglas Drive where there are currently no recycling bins, an option could be to provide large plastic bins that residents put their recycling into and then the refuse operatives could move up to the exit/ car park area to the freighters using light fabric sacks – they currently manually lift general waste plastic sacks. Some consideration would need to be given to receptacles to collect recycling in individual flats in addition to the food waste caddies. Members recognised the difficulty of this task due to the nature of each block needing a personalised plan.