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ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday, 7 October 2025

Time: 6.00pm,

Location: Council Chamber

Contact: committees@stevenage.gov.uk

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

AGENDA

PART 1

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MINUTES - MONDAY 1 SEPTEMBER 2025

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 1 September 2025.

Pages 3 – 6

3. RECYCLING IN FLAT BLOCKS SCRUTINY REVIEW INTERVIEWS

The Committee are invited to interview the Cabinet Portfolio holder for Environment and Planning Policy, Cllr Rob Broom regarding his plans for the service and receiving his response to the questions raised by the Chair in advance of the meeting.

The Committee will receive a written response from Dacorum District Council regarding questions raised by the Chair in advance of the meeting.

The questions raised by the Chair are attached in the agenda papers.

Pages 7 – 8

4. MEMBER FEEDBACK FROM THE SITE VISIT TO THE CAVENDISH ROAD DEPOT AND RIDE ALONG IN REFUSE & RECYCLING FREIGHTER

To receive Member feedback from the site visit to the Cavendish Road Depot and the ride along in the refuse and recycling freighter on Friday 12 September 2025.

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: Monday, 1 September 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Leanne Brady (Chair), Andy McGuinness (Vice Chair), Robert Boyle, Jim Brown, Alistair Gordon, Claire Parris, Ceara Roopchand, Peter Wilkins and Jade Woods

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.35pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Forhad Chowdhury and Anne Wells.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 11 JUNE 2025**

The Committee considered the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2025. Amendments were noted relating to corrections to apologies for absence for Cllr Ceara Roopchand and clarification of speaker attribution. Subject to these amendments, it was agreed that the Minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

The Chair introduced the item and advised Members that while fly tipping would be referred to as part of discussions, enforcement matters were not within the scope of the review.

The Assistant Director (Stevenage Direct Services) introduced the Head of Environmental Operations and the Environmental Development Officer who were leading on the presentation.

Officers provided a detailed presentation which covered the following:

- Approximately 8,000 flats exist in Stevenage, representing 21% of the housing stock. Many were built in the 1960s and 1970s before modern waste systems, creating long-term challenges;
- Key issues included lack of space for bins, difficult access and stairs, and higher rates of contamination compared to houses;
- Refuse chutes in high-rise blocks were often abused or blocked, creating fire risks and requiring daily attendance from caretaking teams;

- Borough-wide contamination rates stood at 1.2%, but flats contributed disproportionately due to misuse and limited information;
- Case studies from Turpin's Rise and Monument Court showed excess cardboard, dumping beside bins and residents using bin stores incorrectly;
- Lessons from phase 1 pilot sites showed large increases in recycling rates following introduction of new signage and leaflets. A sustained increase was maintained over the following year;
- Phase 2 pilots were being prepared with further sites selected across the town;
- Government funding of £700,000 had been secured through Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) to support the works required by the March 2026 'Simpler Recycling' deadline.

Members asked a range of questions and made comments, as summarised below:

High-rise refuse chutes and fire risk

Members queried issues with refuse chutes in high-rise blocks. Officers explained that these were often abused and blocked, creating fire hazards. Caretaking teams had to attend daily to clear them and maintain safety.

Frequency and capacity of collections

Members asked if large blocks such as Monument Court had adequate capacity. Officers confirmed refuse was collected weekly and recycling fortnightly. Monument Court had substantial bin capacity, and discussions with housing providers were ongoing to expand provision ahead of food waste collections.

Population density and capacity calculations

A Member questioned whether population density was factored into planning. Officers confirmed capacity was calculated per property, not per person. Standard allowances were 180 litres refuse, with larger bins provided for households of six or more.

Misuse and external dumping

Concerns were raised that non-residents were depositing waste in bin stores. Officers stated that most misuse came from residents themselves. Newer blocks had coded or gated stores to limit access. CCTV was limited but effective where used.

CCTV coverage

A Member asked what proportion of blocks had CCTV. Officers advised that Monument Court did, but most older blocks did not. Some blocks acted as public cut-throughs, increasing the risk of misuse.

Affordability of bulky waste charges

Members highlighted challenges for residents without cars. Officers confirmed a bulky waste collection service was available for £49. They acknowledged this would not suit everyone, but added that cardboard could be disposed of over several weeks, though this was difficult in small flats.

Fly tipping at Bring Bank sites

Members noted that residents often believed leaving items beside overflowing bins was acceptable. Officers emphasised this was still fly tipping. Campaigns were underway to change perceptions, and there were concerns about commercial misuse of Bring Banks.

Consistency of Bring Bank provision

Members asked if all sites had the same recycling facilities. Officers explained provision varied by site size. Larger sites, such as The Oval, had more bins. Around 40% of townwide fly tipping was linked to Bring Banks.

New legislation and deadlines

Officers confirmed that 'Simpler Recycling' required every household to have access by March 2026. Surveys showed 74 blocks had no recycling, 41 of which were Council-owned and required substantial works. Solutions included ramps, new stores, or using car parking bays.

Ramps, bin stores and new bin design

Members raised the difficulty of installing ramps. Officers said solutions would be site-specific. The new three-wheeled bin worked well for short, shallow steps (up to five) but was unsuitable for larger blocks. The innovation had attracted national media coverage and officers were seeking professional advice as to whether the Stevenage Direct Services design could be patented and the design sold to other authorities to help fund future recycling innovations and projects.

Funding and costs

Officers confirmed £700,000 of government funding had been secured through Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). Early estimates suggested costs might be lower than expected, though some blocks would still require major investment.

Pilot outcomes and communications

Members asked about monitoring. Officers reported recycling increased by 185% after new signage and leaflets, and remained 85% higher a year later. Phase 2 pilots were underway with four additional sites. Communications materials were redesigned to be clearer and more accessible.

Resident feedback on interventions

A Member suggested that residents should be asked which methods (signage, leaflets, bin design) had been most effective in encouraging participation. Officers responded that this had not been included in phase 1, but confirmed it would now be considered for incorporation into phase 2 surveys as a result of the suggestion.

Colour coded bins

Members discussed with officers the merits of colour coded bins. SDS officers explained that coloured bins were more expensive to purchase, so the new recycling bins would all be black but have a large colour sticker on the front and lids. Members queried whether there could be coloured lids used.

Possible areas for recommendations

Members made some suggestions that could become review recommendations

around the following issues:

- Regarding recycling champions officers would be asked to consider encouraging recycling with awards and recognition for the areas with the most recycling, promote with young residents, consider smiley stickers on bins etc.
- Consider using large colour wraps on the bin lids to differentiate different recycling bins
- Regarding Bring Bank sites consider using mobile CCTV of sites with signage saying CCTV in operation – where fly tipping can be evidenced follow up with education and civil prosecution
- Regarding any future plans to rationalise the Bring Bank Sites Members asked to see the plans for early consideration ahead of any public consultation as there were concerns over reducing the capacity

The Committee noted the update and expressed support for the work being undertaken, recognising the challenges of implementing recycling provision across such a diverse range of flat blocks.

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

The Chair introduced the notes from the recent site visit, which were included in the agenda pack, explaining that the visit had provided Members with the opportunity to observe first-hand the challenges and practical constraints associated with waste and recycling provision in a number of flat blocks.

For the benefit of those Members who had been unable to attend, the Chair highlighted the main observations. These included the limited space available for bin storage in older blocks, the difficulties posed by stair access, and the impact of poor signage and contamination on recycling levels.

The Chair noted that Members had also seen examples of positive practice where improvements had already been trialled, and highlighted the value of site visits in informing the Committee's ongoing scrutiny of waste and recycling services.

5 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

6 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Not required.

7 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR

Questions for the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environment & Planning Policy, Cllr Rob Broom re recycling in flat blocks

- What are your priorities for improving recycling in Stevenage?
- What target are you setting for Stevenage regarding improved recycling and over what time period?
- What do you perceive to be the biggest barriers for improved recycling?
- What are your thoughts on encouraging recycling with a recycling champion for a flat block or area?
- Do you see LGR as a possible threat to keeping a direct refuse and recycling service or could it be a benefit to local residents?
- What would you hope recycling in Stevenage would look like in 5 years time? What about 10?
- What does a successful recycling infrastructure look like to you?
- How do you think we should measure the success? E.g. by volume of recycling, residential engagement, etc.

Questions for the neighbouring Hertfordshire district authority of Dacorum re how they addressed recycling in flat blocks

- Please can you describe the level of recycling that you were achieving at Dacorum in your flat blocks prior to a dedicated project to improve recycling in flat blocks and what they were following the project, and have the levels of improved recycling continued?
- How many flat blocks, both Council stock and private does your service cover? Is there a difference between private and council stock recycling rates?
- What were the barriers to improving recycling in flat blocks and how did you overcome them?
- Do you have issues with commercial businesses misusing communal bring bank sites in your area? If so what have you done to try and remedy this?
- Do you have any capacity to stop third parties fly tipping rubbish/recycling into communal bin areas in flat blocks by key codes for residents etc.?
- We're there particular types of flats e.g. high rise, private housing that you have found more difficult to work with? Why?

- Did you have many issues with contamination? If so, what did you do about this?
- How did you engage the Community? Before / during roll out. What approaches do you think worked best? 4. Were there any physical or logistical changes needed? E.g. accessibility, bin storage?
- Did you have to adapt collections?
- If you had to start again what is the biggest lesson you have learned/ what would you change?