

Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Environment and Planning
Date 9 July 2025
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Proposals for the use of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Funding to Improve Recycling Participation

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report builds on the February 2025 General Fund budget report to Cabinet. That report outlined Government Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funding to improve local authority recycling rates, along with its announcements on 'Simpler Recycling' (sometimes referred to as the 'four bin approach'), that Councils also need to take account of.
- 1.2 The Government allocated fixed amounts to local authorities for 2025/6, to enable early implementation of initiatives, pending the (currently draft) 'Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging and Packing Waste) Regulations coming into force.
- 1.3 This report seeks authority to spend some of the allocated £1.078m funding for 2025/6 to deliver the new and enhanced initiatives set out in this report, aimed at achieving higher rates of recycling in Stevenage. This includes the introduction of facilities at flat blocks that currently have no/limited on-site provision and/or require building works to enable level access for collection purposes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the use of up to £719,000 from EPR funding to deliver recycling improvements to seventy-four flat blocks, to provide the necessary opportunities for residents to recycle plastics, glass, cardboard and food.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approves up to £199,000 from EPR funding to support the implementation of separate food waste collections to residents, should the funding received for this from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) need to be increased.
- 2.3 That Cabinet approves an allocation of £52,000 from the EPR funding to fund the SDS waste project manager costs in 25/26 and commits to a subsequent allocation to fund the salary (with any pay increase) in 26/27 (subject to funding), to deliver the legislative requirement for separate weekly food waste collections from residential premises from April 2026, and to support the delivery of the flat block recycling improvements.

3. BACKGROUND

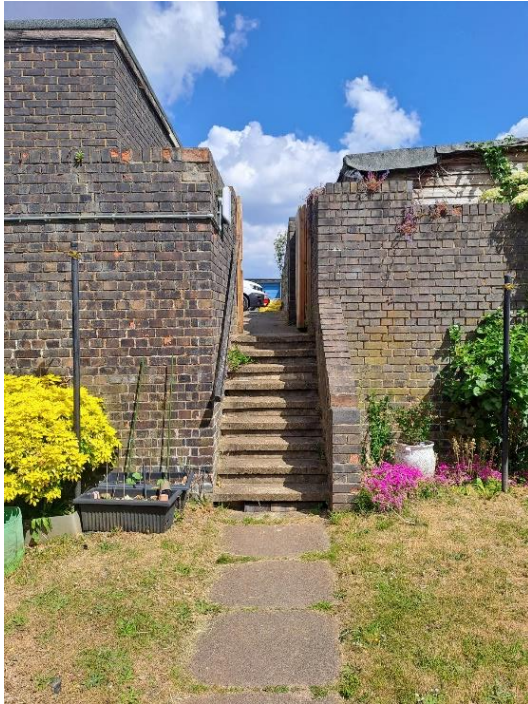
- 3.1 Simpler Recycling is a UK Government initiative aimed at standardising and streamlining recycling practices across England. Introduced by DEFRA, the policy addresses the long-standing issue of inconsistent recycling rules across local councils, which has led to confusion and inefficiencies.
- 3.2 From April 2026, all residents must be provided with the ability to dispose of waste and recycling, at the kerbside, in accordance with 'Simpler Recycling' and 'standardised waste streams' principles. This will require most households and workplaces to separate waste into four main containers: -
 - Residual (non-recyclable) waste
 - Food waste (can be mixed with garden waste)
 - Paper and Card
 - Dry recyclables (plastic, metal and glass)
- 3.3 EPR in England is a major environmental reform that shifts the cost of managing packaging waste from taxpayers to the producers who create it. EPR requires producers, such as manufacturers, importers, and brand owners, to pay the full net cost of collecting, sorting, treating, and recycling the packaging waste they generate.
- 3.4 For 25/26, the Council will receive its £1,078,000 one year only allocation in three instalments: November '25, January '26 and March '26. As it was only guaranteed for one year, the funding is not included within the 25/26 base budget. From 26/27 it will be included with the Council's Core Spending Power (CSP). However, it should be noted that it is anticipated EPR funding for 26/27, and future years, will not be to the level received for 25/26. While EPR funding is not ringfenced, DEFRA guidance

recommends it is used for waste collection operations and for improving recycling performance.

- 3.5 In 2023, a pilot scheme was introduced at six flat block locations to seek to increase recycling participation. As part of the initiative, new bins and bin stores were installed, accompanied by clearer signage, and participation levels were closely monitored. The initial results showed a 185% increase in recycling. Further monitoring in late 2024 indicated a reduction, however recycling rates remained significantly higher than they were before the pilot at 85% above pre-pilot levels. Further details are provided in Appendix B.
- 3.6 The Council's recycling performance is currently 39%. This is below the national average of 44% in England and the lowest compared to neighbouring authorities in Hertfordshire. The high proportion of flats in the town is a key factor in the current rate, which further evidences the need to provide recycling facilities at flat blocks. The additional provision at flats will boost Stevenage's drive to achieve its higher target of recycling 60% of the town's waste by 2030.

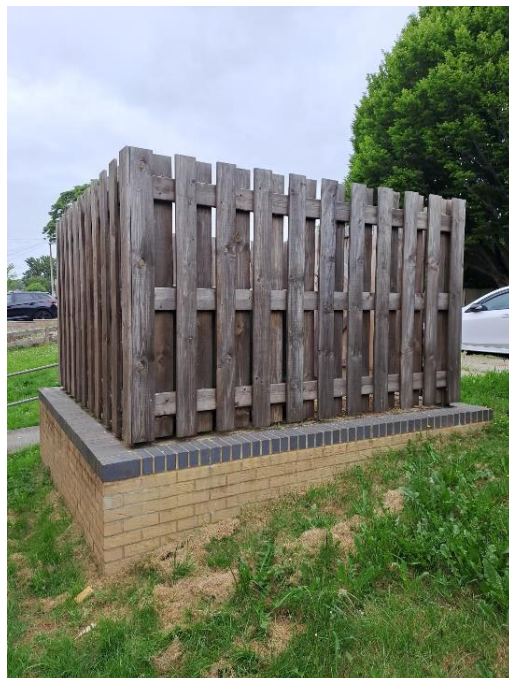
4. FUNDING REQUIREMENTS – FLAT BLOCKS

- 4.1 It has been identified that seventy-four flat blocks, both Council and privately owned, currently do not have recycling provisions. These blocks also have limited general waste provision, utilising Council issued purple bags for waste disposal, as opposed to the standard wheeled bin used across the town.
- 4.2 A survey to document the level of recycling deficiencies, physical constraints to recycling, what was required to be able to provide recycling, and to identify the barriers and challenges for implementation was completed in June 2025. This also identified that of the seventy-four blocks, fifty-nine were Council owned.
- 4.3 Access was the principal concern identified, with many having either steps leading up to, or down into, the grounds and to where the current bin provision is located. Steps pose a challenge to safely removing wheeled bins for emptying by the waste and recycling operatives. Example of physical challenges at flat blocks are shown below.



4.4 Structural works are required to provide the necessary bin allocation for both recycling and waste, such as: ramp installation, bin store refurbishment and installation of new bin stores to the front of properties.

4.5 Examples of locations that have been previously upgraded are shown below. The first photograph shows a ramp replacing steps. Photograph two shows a newly installed bin store.



4.6 The surveys completed in June 2025 identified forty-one Council owned blocks that need structural works. Each block has separate requirements, but the focus of the work will in the main include:

- Access ramps replacing steps so wheeled bins can be safely emptied by the collection teams
- Improvements to existing bins stores to allow for additional bin storage
- New bin stores being constructed
- Enhanced signage to provide clear instructions on what items go in each bin

The remaining blocks were either private, already had the infrastructure in place for bins to be directly placed or will be serviced by the Council's self-designed wheeled bin for use with steps. Some of the privately owned blocks will receive signage improvements.

4.7 The image below illustrates this innovative design. Having explored whether this design already existed with wheeled bin suppliers, and establishing it did not, Council officers designed, sourced parts and fabricated the bin in-house. The bin is currently being trialled and if proven to be fit for purpose, will reduce the need for costly construction works to be undertaken in some locations.

SBC designed wheeled bin



- 4.8 The estimated budget required for the works to forty-one blocks is £719,000. This has been calculated using the most prudent estimated option costed to mitigate the need for any additional requests. Currently, options are still being evaluated but the cheapest option being £266,000 with an average total cost of options at £471,000. Members will be updated on costs and, should the works cost less than £719,000, this will offer funding for further initiatives that can improve recycling participation / reduce waste in the future.
- 4.9 It is intended to commence the physical improvement works in August 2025 with completion scheduled for April 2026. While the volume of works required means this is an ambitious timeframe, works will be procured and coordinated via the Council's in-house teams which should minimise delay and achieve a competitive price.
- 4.10 Appendix A provides an overview of the locations and scope of the works required. The survey specifies up to three options per block. The most suitable option and exact cost are still to be established. This exercise will be completed by August 2025.
- 4.11 Residents will be engaged to explain the planned works, the reasons behind the changes, and the positive impact recycling can have; both for individuals and the wider environment. These benefits include increased recycling rates, less waste sent to landfill, and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.
- 4.12 A comprehensive communication plan is being developed, which will be implemented across the town to highlight the planned changes. Key among these is the introduction of a separate weekly food waste collection service. The rollout will make use of social media platforms, local publications such as the Chronicle and the Comet, alongside the distribution of leaflets and bin stickers. Tailored messaging will be provided to residents living in flat blocks to ensure everyone is well informed.
- 4.13 It is important to note that the current waste and recycling collection service in Stevenage is well regarded by residents. The missed bin collection rate consistently remains below 1%, reflecting strong performance. Officers continue to seek opportunities to enhance efficiency and further improve service delivery.

5. INTRODUCTION OF DOMESTIC FOOD WASTE COLLECTION – DEFRA FUNDING GAP

- 5.1 DEFRA has provided both capital and revenue grant funding to facilitate the implementation of a weekly food waste collection, as part of Government's 'Simpler Recycling' initiative. The details of the legislation, and implications for Stevenage, were presented to Cabinet in July 2024.
- 5.2 The 'transitional funding' allocation for Stevenage has been released and totals £232,000. This funding is for the delivery of waste receptacles, communications and project management.
- 5.3 This funding does not cover the cost of operational staffing, who will need to be recruited and trained prior to launching the service. Additional works to the

Cavendish transfer station, including a licence variation with the Environment Agency, are also not covered in the funding allocated.

- 5.4 A Project Manager has been appointed to lead the implementation of changes to the Council's waste and recycling services. Utilising EPR funding to support this role; both now and in future recycling initiatives, would offer a strategic advantage in boosting recycling rates across Stevenage.
- 5.5 It has been calculated that the funding shortfall is approximately £199,000. Officers are submitting an appeal to DEFRA, highlighting costs that have not been considered. It is requested that this allocation of EPR funding is ringfenced in a designated pot to use should DEFRA refuse the request. This would also ensure there is no pressure on the general fund.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There is no allocation within the Council's existing budgets to support the works required at the flat blocks to meet the legislative requirements of Simpler Recycling.
- 6.2 The establishment budget for refuse and recycling supports forty-three operational roles. The introduction of the weekly food waste service will require an additional 9 staff. On-going grant funding (April '26) from DEFRA is expected to cover staffing costs for at least the first year. However, there is no funding to cover recruiting staff and training them prior to launching the service, and there is no existing establishment budget to support this.
- The EPR allocation for 25/26 is £1,078,000
 - Required Budget for flat blocks = £719,000
 - Required Budget for DEFRA funding shortfall = £199,000
 - Required budget for project Management = £52,000
 - Remaining EPR balance = £108,000
- 6.3 Any remaining funding from the £1,078,000 EPR allocation from 25/26 could be utilised for further initiatives once the 26/27 EPR funding allocation has been confirmed. Members will be updated and consulted on further initiatives at the appropriate point.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Simpler Recycling became law on 31 March 2025. The works detailed in this report are required to ensure the council comply with this new legislation.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There is reputational risk if the Council does not provide the facilities and service provision to residents in accordance with Simpler Recycling legislation.

9. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Some proposed bin store structures may require planning permission, to be agreed prior to work commencing.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There will be loss of grass and/or shrub bed areas to accommodate new bins stores within the flat block grounds. However, this will be minimal, and the works will support environmental benefits from increased recycling rates.

11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 In providing the facilities essential for recycling waste, the Council is ensuring that all flat block residents have the opportunity to recycle their waste within the flat block areas.

12. SUMMARY

- 12.1 To comply with Simpler Recycling legislation, funding is requested to ensure the Council's flat block infrastructure supports residents' ability to recycle responsibly.
- 12.2 Funding is also requested to support any shortfall between DEFRA grant funding and the actual cost to implement the operational changes required to meet Simpler Recycling.
- 12.3 Overall, an allocation of £970,000 is requested from EPR funds to support flat block improvements and operational staffing needs for Simpler Recycling. This will leave a balance of circa £108,000.