

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