

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 7 October 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Leanne Brady (Chair), Jim Brown, Robert Boyle, Forhad Chowdhury, Alistair Gordon, Dermot Kehoe, Claire Parris, Ceara Roopchand, Peter Wilkins and Jade Woods

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.30pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Andy McGuinness.

2 MINUTES - MONDAY 1 SEPTEMBER 2025

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Environment and Economy Select Committee meeting held on 1 September were approved and signed by the Chair.

3 RECYCLING IN FLAT BLOCKS SCRUTINY REVIEW INTERVIEWS

The Committee considered the item on Recycling in Flat Blocks, as part of the ongoing scrutiny review. The Chair welcomed Councillor Broom as Portfolio Holder for environment and Officers to the meeting.

The Chair noted that several questions had been shared with Councillor Broom in advance and would be discussed during the meeting.

In response to a question about priorities for improving recycling in Stevenage, Councillor Broom explained that the current focus was on food waste and recycling within flat blocks. It was noted that the aim was to reduce contamination and increase recycling rates through clearer communication and engagement with residents.

The Committee discussed the forthcoming government mandated introduction of food waste collections. Officers confirmed that while the Council needed to meet a minimum standard by March 2025, there was an ambition to exceed the minimum government standards. It was noted that approximately 25% of food in the UK was wasted, and that the introduction of separate food waste collections would significantly help to improve recycling rates.

Councillor Broom stated that he was reluctant to set a specific numerical goal, but expected to see an increase in recycling rates by next year. It was noted that the data would be reviewed in Summer and Autumn 2026 to assess progress.

Officers noted that the Council had a long-term target to achieve a 60% recycling rate by 2030. This would be supported by national measures such as the 'polluter pays' principle and efforts to reduce non-recyclable packaging.

Following a question to Councillor Broom about the barriers to improved recycling rates. In response, it was highlighted that resident engagement and participation were key challenges.

Members discussed the concept of introducing recycling champions within flat blocks. Councillor Broom and officers supported the concept, noting it had been trialled successfully in a pilot scheme, but had low participation. Members suggested introducing incentives, such as recognition through local awards for adult and junior champion categories, to encourage involvement.

Members sought clarification on the role of a recycling champion. Officers explained that, in the pilot scheme, a resident acted as a liaison between the Council and tenants, promoting recycling and achieving positive outcomes.

Members highlighted the need for recycling literature and leaflets to be available in translated formats and better education around safe battery disposal. Officers noted that work was underway to address the safe disposal of batteries. This was in response to national concerns about waste-related fires, with a focus on public awareness and operational safety.

Members also suggested engaging schools and incorporating recycling information into new tenancy inductions. Officers noted that engagement work had been undertaken in local schools through assemblies to encourage recycling among children, with the aim of influencing positive behaviour within households.

Members highlighted the need to consider community dynamics when selecting Champions to ensure positive engagement within flat blocks. Officers acknowledged this and noted that clear expectations and guidance would be important for any future recycling champion's scheme.

A question was raised to the Portfolio Holder to ask if he perceived Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) as a possible threat to keeping a direct refuse and recycling service. It was noted that he did not see an immediate threat and supported the Council's current direct delivery model, as it offered local accountability and flexibility compared to outsourcing to third-party contractors.

Members commented that future LGR could potentially lead to reduced standards. It was noted that a joint waste contract for North and East Herts had been recently re-procured. Officers explained that existing arrangements typically remained in place during reorganisation processes, with future service structures depending on the priorities and approach of new authorities.

It was noted that benchmarking key performance indicators (KPIs) and costs against outsourced services would strengthen the Council's case in any future discussions, particularly if it could demonstrate comparable or better value.

In response to a question regarding the future of recycling in Stevenage, it was noted that the Portfolio Holder hoped to see significant improvements over the next five to ten years. This would be supported by the initiatives such as food waste collections in flat blocks and the anticipated inclusion of low-density polyethylene recycling.

Councillor Broom considered Stevenage's current recycling infrastructure to be effective, with ongoing improvements in areas developing. It was noted that there had been a progress in reducing vehicle emissions by using hydrogenated vegetable oil (HVO) as fuel.

The final question asked to the Portfolio Holder was how the Council should measure success. In response, it was noted that measurements could be made through increased recycling rates, improved resident engagement and the delivery of low carbon and environmentally sustainable services.

Members discussed the importance of increasing the percentage of recycling while encouraging residents to produce less waste overall, in line with the waste hierarchy. Officers highlighted the role of the Council in promoting repair and reuse schemes and communicating these opportunities to residents.

It was noted that government initiatives and producer responsibilities, such as packaging taxes, were also contributing to reducing non-recycling waste.

It was noted that Members discussed the ongoing challenges of waste management and fly tipping. Members asked the Portfolio Holder to consider introducing a community collection scheme for bulky waste items each month to help reduce fly tipping, but the Portfolio Holder stated that he was not in favour of providing a free service but would consider other ways to tackle this issue.

These challenges were acknowledged, and it was confirmed that fly tipping enforcement would be considered in a forthcoming meeting. Councillor Broom noted that fly tipping and the practice of leaving items marked "free" outside properties negatively affected the appearance of neighbourhoods.

The Portfolio Holder highlighted existing enforcement including CCTV and warning letters, and stressed the importance of resident responsibility, noting that concessionary bulky waste collections were available at a set fee.

A question was raised regarding if the Council tracked any recycling outside council services such as at supermarket collection points. Officers confirmed that this was not currently monitored, and data could be obtained from the Environment Agency.

Members highlighted that while education and awareness supported responsible recycling, capacity issues at bring bank sites may pressure residents into fly tipping. It was noted that these sites were predominantly for recyclables, not residual waste,

and that future monitoring, enhancements to flat block recycling, and targeted enforcement would help manage misuse.

Members noted that the Council could signpost retailers offering appliance recycling, which would provide residents with convenient options and potentially encourage more retailers to offer this service. Officers noted that Hertfordshire County Council had a “Recycle Now” tool which allowed users to find local retailers offering recycling as well as recycling centres. Officers would ensure that this resource was clearly linked on the Stevenage Borough Council’s website.

A question was raised about an update on the physical modifications to the flat blocks, including ramps and bin bays. Officers reported that approximately 23 sites had been revisited with engineers, and that drawings and pricing had been completed. A meeting was scheduled with officers from multiple departments, including leasehold resident services, to review all plans.

Dacorum Borough Council – Summary Report Review

Members reviewed the Recycling in Flats Summary Report provided by Dacorum Borough Council. It was noted that the findings aligned with Stevenage’s current approach. Members thanked the officer from Dacorum for providing the information to their review.

Key points included common barriers such as limited space, restricted bin access, low resident engagement, and challenges engaging privately managed flats.

The Council’s communications strategy, including leaflets, social media, and food waste campaigns, was highlighted. Differences from Dacorum’s rollout were noted, such as Stevenage Council not using bin apertures due to unintended issues like fly tipping.

Overall, Stevenage Borough Council was considered well placed to implement improvements due to the smaller scale of flat blocks across Stevenage.

Members were invited to submit any further questions for Dacorum to Officers.

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

Members shared their feedback on visits to Cavendish Road and freighter operations.

It was noted that the depot was very clean, well organised and safe, with effective systems for odour control, fire detection and recycling processes.

Members highlighted the efficiency, commercial awareness and professionalism of staff.

Observations included challenges with bulky waste, bin store access at the new

Forster Park Development and potential risks to staff.

Officers noted these concerns and explained that Planning officers were inspecting the site and liaising with the developer to establish short-term and permanent solutions.

Members discussed residual waste disposal including energy from recycling paper exported overseas, noting environmental and ethical considerations.

Overall, the visits were considered valuable for understanding operations and Members thanked officers for their time. Stevenage Direct Services officers invited any other Members who wished to visit the depot to contact them for an individual visit.

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