Part I – Release to Press

Agenda item:

Meeting	**ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE**
Portfolio Area	Environment & Planning Policy
Date	**24 NOVEMBER 2025**

DRAFT REPORT – RECYCLING IN FLAT BLOCKS REVIEW

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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To consider the report and recommendations of the Environment & Economy Select Committee Scrutiny review into the recycling in flat blocks.

2 BACKGROUND & SCRUTINY ISSUES IDENTIFIED

2.1 When Members considered their work programme for the 2025-26 Municipal Year at its meeting on 14 January 2025 and affirmed on 11 June 2025 it was agreed to include a review of the Council's recycling provision in Council housing stock low rise flat blocks.

2.2 Scope and focus of the review

2.2.1 The Committee met on 11 June 2025 E&E Select Committee - 11 June 2025 - Scoping Document to agree the scope for the review, and it agreed should consider the following areas:

2.2.2 Scope for the review:

2.2.3 Members noted that the topic had previously been touched upon and now warranted a dedicated focus. Waste and Recycling in Flat Blocks had been identified as a key concern due to the increasing number of such developments in Stevenage.

2.2.4 It was agreed that the review would include site visits, a presentation from officers, comparative analysis with another authority, Dacorum Borough Council were subsequently approached to provide external insight, given their prior experience in similar initiatives, and close engagement with officers. The review would focus on recycling in flat blocks and also address the related issue of recycling at bring banks. Members also wished to look at communications and recycling rates.

2.2.5 During discussion of the scope for the review it was noted that the review had a fairly narrow focus on recycling in low rise flat blocks. Members had identified wider issues affecting recycling that they would like to visit in the future but were not included in the review these included:

- a request for data on the Council's own waste from events and public spaces (e.g. Stevenage Day), as waste appeared not to be segregated
- regarding capturing tenant voices, proposing resident surveys as part of the evidence-gathering process
- consideration of more recycling bins in public areas such as parks and footpaths
- an audit of recycling practices within the Council's own buildings

2.3 **Process of the review**

2.3.1 The Committee met formally on 6 occasions in 2025 and informally with two site visits on 21 July and 12 September to undertake the review and received input from the following groups and people on the following dates:

- 27 February 2025 – PowerPoint Presentation on the SDS recycling service 27 02 27 - Waste and Recycling Services Presentation
- 11 June 2025 – draft scoping document and PowerPoint Presentation presented by SBC Stevenage Direct Services 11 June 2025 – Draft Scoping document for Recycling in flat blocks .
- 21 July 2025 – Site visit to Flat Blocks with Stevenage Direct Services Officers 21 July 2025 - Notes from Member site visit to recycling in flat blocks
- 1 September 2025 – SDS Officer Presentation - Recycling in Flat Blocks.
- 12 September 2025 – Site visit to Cavendish Road SDS Depot and Recycling collection service with SDS Refuse and Recycling staff
- 7 October 2025 - Interviews with Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environment and Planning Policy, Cllr Rob Broom and written input

from Dacorum Borough Council Agenda for Environment & Economy Select Committee on Tuesday, 7 October 2025, 6.00pm.

- 24 November 2025 – Draft report and recommendations of the Recycling in Flat Blocks review
- 22 December 2025 – Final report and recommendations of the review into recycling in flat blocks

2.3.2 Photos from the site visit to flat blocks on 21 July 2025:

Sites visited by Members were: 189-199 Vardon Road • 11-77 Douglas Drive • 64-70 Derby Way • 71-77 Sefton Road

2.3.3 The following officers and members provided input into the review:

- *Cllr Rob Broom, Portfolio Holder, Environment & Planning Policy*
- *Steve Dupoy, AD Stevenage Direct Services*
- *Kris White, Head of Environmental Operations*
- *Colin Littlechild – Operations Manager*
- *Claire Nicholls – Project Manager – Waste*
- *Claire Murrell - Environmental Policy, Strategy & Projects Officer*
- *Claudia Jones – Dacorum Borough Council*

3 REVIEW FINDINGS

3.1 As part of the review Members noted the following details regarding the collection of refuse and recycling in Stevenage:

3.1.1 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.

3.1.2 Key issues included lack of space for bins, difficult access and stairs, and higher rates of contamination compared to houses.

3.1.3 Refuse chutes in high-rise blocks were often abused or blocked, creating fire risks and requiring daily attendance from caretaking teams.

3.1.4 Borough-wide contamination rates stood at 1.2%, but flats contributed disproportionately due to misuse and limited information.

3.1.5 Case studies from Matalan, Turpin's Rise and Monument Court (see images below) showed excess cardboard, dumping beside bins and residents using bin stores incorrectly.

3.1.6 Lessons from phase 1 pilot sites showed large increases in recycling rates following the introduction of improved bin stores, new signage and leaflets. A sustained increase was maintained over the following year.

3.1.7 Phase 2 pilots were being prepared with further sites selected across the town.

3.1.8 Government funding of £700,000 had been secured through Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) to support works to upgrade infrastructure and provide recycling facilities required by the March 2026 'Simpler Recycling' deadline.

3.2 Frequency and Capacity issues

3.2.1 Regarding Frequency and capacity of collections Members queried if large blocks such as Monument Court had adequate capacity. It was confirmed that refuse was collected weekly and recycling fortnightly. New build flats such as Monument Court had substantial bin capacity, and discussions with housing providers were ongoing to expand provision ahead of food waste collections.

3.3 Population density and capacity calculations

3.3.1 Regarding population density and capacity calculations capacity is calculated per property, not per person. Standard allowances are for 180 litres refuse bins, with larger bins provided for households of six or more.

3.4 Misuse and external dumping

3.4.1 Members noted that, on some occasions, non-residents were depositing waste in bin stores. However, most misuse came from residents themselves. Newer blocks had coded or gated stores to limit access. CCTV was limited but effective where used.

3.5 CCTV coverage

3.5.1 With regard to the proportion of blocks that had CCTV. It was noted that modern flat blocks like Monument Court had CCTV, but most older blocks did not. Some blocks acted as public cut-throughs, increasing the risk of misuse.

3.6 Affordability of bulky waste charges

3.6.1 Regarding the handling of bulky waste, Members highlighted challenges for residents without cars. It was noted that a bulky waste collection service was available for £49, but this would not suit everyone. It is possible that cardboard could be disposed of over several weeks, though this was difficult to store in small flats.

3.7 Fly tipping at Bring Bank sites

3.7.1 Members noted that residents often believed leaving items beside overflowing bins at the bring bank sites was acceptable. However, it was emphasised that this was still fly tipping. Campaigns were underway to change perceptions, and there were concerns about commercial misuse of Bring Banks.

3.8 Consistency of Bring Bank provision

3.8.1 Regarding the size of the recycling facilities at each bring bank site it is noted that provision varied by site size. Larger sites, such as The Oval, had more bins. Around 40% of the townwide fly tipping was linked to Bring Banks.

3.9 New legislation and deadlines

3.9.1 ‘Simpler Recycling’ required every household to have access to recycling 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.

3.10 Ramps, bin stores and new bin design

3.10.1 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.

3.11 Funding and costs

3.11.1 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.

3.12 Pilot outcomes and communications

3.12.1 Members asked about monitoring. Officers reported recycling increased by 185% after improved bin stores and new signage and leaflets were introduced 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.

3.13 Resident feedback on intervention

3.13.1 Members 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.

3.14 Introduction of food waste collection

3.14.1 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.

3.15 Different service options for low-rise social blocks, high rise social blocks and higher density high rise private blocks

3.15.1 Members are aware that building heights will have an impact on the recycling solutions that are able to be delivered at each location, as there are the differences in recycling capacity between low-rise social blocks and higher-density private blocks.

3.16 **Feedback from Member site visit on 21 July 2025**

3.16.1 To assist with the review some Members from the Committee carried out a site visit to various flat block sites around Stevenage, including Vardon Road, Douglas Drive, Derby Way and Sefton Road as well as the Bring Bank site at the Oval Shops. The notes from the site visit can be found at the link. In Summary the key findings from the site visit were:

3.17 Vardon Road

3.17.1 Enhanced lighting would be required at the proposed new bin store area (part of the exiting car park). This site may be difficult for residents with mobility issues to use as it is accessed via a steep set of steps. Other options for storage at a lower level in the communal garden area may need to be considered.

3.18 Douglas Drive

3.18.1 Members recommend the consideration of creating an aesthetically pleasing bin store area with planting and fences utilising some of the amenity land on the large pedestrianised paved area.

3.19 Derby Way

3.19.1 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 which could be screened with replacement shrubs.

3.20 Sefton Road

3.20.1 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.

3.21 Bring Bank Site at the Oval Shops

3.21.1 There are issues with fly-tipping at these sites. The sites are provided to assist residents in flat blocks above the shops who currently have no capacity to

recycle. The fly tipping is, in part, from commercial premises nearby who leave tubs of used cooking oil. The sites are cleared 3 times a week. 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.

3.22 Other issues raised by Members at the site visit

3.22.1 Members made the following observations:

- 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.
- Members recognised the difficulty of this task due to the nature of each block needing a personalised plan.
- 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 the receptacles that would need to be provided to collect recycling in individual flats in addition to the food waste caddies.

3.23 **Interview with and input from Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environment and Planning Policy, Councillor Rob Broom**

3.23.1 In advance of the interview session the Chair had provided Cllr Rob Broom with some written questions:

- 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

3.24 Focus on Improved recycling rates - 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.

3.25 Councillor Broom stated that he was reluctant to set a specific numerical goal regarding the percentage increase in recycling 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.

3.26 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.

3.27 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.

3.28 Focus on Recycling Champions and improved resident participation in recycling - 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.

3.29 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.

3.30 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.

3.31 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.

3.32 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.

3.33 Possible Impact of Local Government Reorganisation - 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.

3.34 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.

3.35 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.

3.36 Direction of travel for recycling in Stevenage - 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.

3.37 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.

3.38 The Portfolio Holder was asked 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.

3.39 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.

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

3.41 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.

3.42 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.

3.43 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.

3.44 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.

3.45 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.

3.46 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 retailors offering recycling as well as recycling centres. Officers would ensure that this resource was clearly linked on the Stevenage Borough Council's website.

3.47 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.

3.48 **Dacorum Borough Council – Summary Report Review**

3.48.1 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.

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

3.48.3 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.

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

3.49 **Summary of key issues relating to recycling in flat blocks**:

- There is not a 'one size fits all approach' that can be adopted – each flat block and location requires a bespoke approach, making it complicated to deliver
- A campaign to engage with residents to take up recycling is required including identifying recycling champions and targeting young people via campaigns in schools
- The introduction of food waste recycling would provide opportunities to improve the recycling rates in Stevenage and reduce the amount of residual waste going for incineration
- The funding that the Council will receive from central government from the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funding should provide

the necessary capital funding to deliver recycling facilities across the Council's flat block housing stock

4 REVIEW RECOMMENNDATIONS

4.1 **Recommendation 1 – (i) Recycling Champions** - It is recommended that 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.

4.2 **Recommendation 2 – colour wraps on the bins** - It is recommended that SDS Officers consider using large colour wraps on the bin lids to differentiate different recycling bins, this would be a cheaper and easier option than multiple-coloured bins.

4.3 **Recommendation 3 – Bring Bank Sites** - (i) Regarding Bring Bank sites, Officers consider using mobile CCTV of sites with signage saying CCTV in operation and where fly tipping can be evidenced follow up with education and civil prosecution and (ii) 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.

4.4 **Recommendation 4 – Mobile CCTV at Bring Bank Sites** – Members discussed the use of CCTV at Bring Bank Sites to monitor the fly tipping issues and whether this could be assisted by AI technology to target potential fly tipping abusers.

4.5 **Recommendation 5 – Use of easy to understand and easy to do recycling methods at flat blocks** - Members recognise the challenges of implementing recycling provision across such a diverse range of flat blocks and that there is not one single solution that can be rolled out across the flat blocks. It is recommended that 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.

4.6 **Recommendation 6 – A possible solutions to collection of recycling at Douglas Drive Flats and similar flat blocks** - It is recommended that in areas similar to the Douglas Drive flats, where there are currently no recycling bins, an option could be to provide large plastic bins or large strong flexible sacks that residents would 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 (the SDS refuse operatives currently manually lift general waste plastic sacks up a set of steps to the refuse freighters)

4.7 **Recommendation 7 – Meassures to counter fly tipping around bin stores by non-residents** – It is recommended that Officers ensure that all new bin stores have locks of some sort and existing ones are also made secure to stop incidents of fly tipping from non-residents.

4.8 **Recommendation 8 – Use of innovative 3 wheeled bin**. Members commend Stevenage Direct Services Officers for the innovation of their own designed 3 wheeled bin. (i) Members recommend that a survey of flat block

sites be carried out to see where this bin can be utilised in recycling collections around the town and (ii) That SDS work with the Assistant Director, Business Change and Digital regarding the business opportunity for patenting the design.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

5.1.1 Funding to implement Member recommendations could be resourced via the central government funding award to SBC via the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funding.

5.2 Legal Implications

5.2.1 Nothing specific in relation to the report.

5.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications

5.3.1 Regarding Age and Disability any new recycling options in flat blocks would need to take into consideration the ability of elderly and disabled residents' ability to engage in any new recycling schemes.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS – Hyper links have been provided to all relevant meetings related to this review.