

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday, 19 March 2026

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Leanne Brady (Chair), Andy McGuinness (Vice-Chair), Robert Boyle, Jim Brown, Forhad Chowdhury, Alistair Gordon, Rob Henry, Claire Parris, Peter Wilkins and Peter Clark

Start / End Start Time: 18:00
Time: End Time: 19:45

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ceara Roopchand, and Jade Woods. It was noted that Councillor Peter Clark attended the meeting as a substitute for Councillor Ceara Roopchand.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - TUESDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2026

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 February were agreed by the Committee.

3 CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATIONS PLAN

The Committee received a presentation on the draft Climate Change Adaptation Plan from officers, including the Head of Climate Action and supporting officers. The Chair invited members to raise questions throughout the presentation.

Officers stated that the report had been brought to Committee to inform its development prior to submission to Cabinet. It was emphasised that climate change was no longer a future concern but an ongoing issue affecting the UK, including Stevenage. It was noted that average global temperatures had already increased by approximately 1.3°C and were projected to continue rising.

The Committee acknowledged that climate change impacts were increasingly relevant to local government service delivery and long-term planning.

The Committee was advised that future projections indicated:

- Hotter, drier summers and milder, wetter winters
- Increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events
- Increase in number of hot days (above 25°C)
- Slight increase in annual rainfall, but with greater seasonal variation and intensity

Members discussed the implications of seasonal rainfall changes, noting that while

overall rainfall may increase, summer water shortages and winter flooding risks would both intensify.

The Committee further noted that extreme weather events, such as storms, flooding, and heatwaves, had already occurred locally and were expected to become more frequent and severe.

Officers outlined the broader policy framework, including:

- International agreements such as the Paris Agreement
- Development of global adaptation frameworks and indicators
- UK legislative requirements under the Climate Change Act 2008
- Climate Change Risk Assessments (CCRA) on a five-year cycle
- National Adaptation Programmes (NAP), currently NAP3 (2023–2028)
- Adaptation Reporting Power (ARP) requiring organisations to assess and report risks

The Committee was informed that a local Climate Change Risk Assessment had been completed in 2024, identifying 45 climate-related risks to council operations, assets, and services.

Key points included:

- Risks were categorised by climate drivers such as flooding, drought, storms, and extreme heat
- Impacts were assessed on services including housing, green spaces, infrastructure, and public health
- Risks were evaluated using likelihood and impact scoring, aligned with existing corporate risk frameworks

Members noted that:

- Most risks were currently low to medium but would increase significantly under 2°C and 4°C warming scenarios
- Engagement with Heads of Service had been undertaken to embed climate considerations across the organisation

Natural Environment - Risks identified included:

- Damage to parks, woodlands, and green spaces
- Tree loss due to pests, disease, and climate stress
- Increased maintenance costs

Members discussed:

- Risks of tree failure and associated liabilities
- Need for climate-resilient planting strategies
- Data gaps in tree inventories and carbon baselines

A specific high-risk example was highlighted at Fairlands Valley Park, where:

- Water temperature and runoff could increase algal blooms
- Impacts could include biodiversity loss, health risks, and reduced recreational use
- Existing mitigation included water quality monitoring and treatment

Proposed actions included improved monitoring and exploration of alternative treatment methods.

Health, Community, and Built Environment - Key risks included:

- Poor air quality during heatwaves
- Increased pests and food safety risks

- Damp, mould, and structural issues in buildings
- Increased demand on council services

Members noted:

- Potential increases in maintenance and insurance costs
- Greater demand for temporary housing
- Increased workload for environmental health services

Waste and Battery Risks

The Committee discussed emerging risks associated with lithium-ion batteries, including:

- Increased fire risk in waste collection and storage
- Challenges in identifying and safely disposing of batteries
- Limited accessibility of disposal points for residents

Officers confirmed that:

- The issue was recognised as a high risk
- Communication campaigns were ongoing
- Future service changes, such as kerbside collection, were under consideration

Members raised concerns regarding accessibility and public safety, and the need for further review.

Building Fabric and Council Assets

The Committee received further detail on risks relating to the deterioration of building fabric across council-owned properties, including corporate, commercial, and residential stock.

It was noted that:

- Climate factors such as flooding, extreme heat, drought, storms, and UV exposure would accelerate structural degradation
- Increased maintenance and repair costs were anticipated
- There was potential for increased tenant complaints and service demand

Infrastructure

The Committee considered risks relating to infrastructure, including transport networks, power supply, telecommunications, water systems, and electric vehicle charging points.

It was noted that:

- Although much infrastructure was not directly owned by the Council, disruptions would significantly impact service delivery
- Increased reliance on digital systems and electrification heightened vulnerability

Business and Industry (Council Operations)

The Committee noted risks affecting council operations and staff, including:

- Increased health and safety risks, particularly for outdoor workers
- Reduced productivity due to extreme temperatures or travel disruption
- Impacts on leisure services and council-run events
- Extreme weather could lead to event cancellations, facility damage, and loss of revenue
- Energy demand and associated costs were likely to increase

The Committee was advised of wider global risks impacting the Council indirectly, including: Supply chain disruptions, global economic instability, climate-driven migration and impacts on food supply.

Officers outlined the draft five-year Climate Adaptation Plan, which aimed to:

- Strengthen council services and resilience
- Improve forecasting of future resource requirements
- Support residents and communities in adapting to climate change

The Plan included 18 proposed actions across four key themes:

Evidence, Policies, Communities and Infrastructure

It was noted that the Plan had been developed with consideration of future local government reorganisation (LGR).

The Committee discussed broader environmental impacts, including:

- Potential introduction of new pests and invasive species
- Impacts on biodiversity net gain

Members noted:

- Existing biodiversity monitoring and management activities
- Limitations in data and resources for comprehensive assessment
- Importance of national and regional coordination

The role of planning policies, including biodiversity net gain, was also noted, with a need for ongoing monitoring and local delivery.

Members further noted:

- The importance of maintaining green spaces to mitigate urban heat island effects
- Risks associated with loss of green space through development
- Need for balanced planning approaches integrating green infrastructure

Members thanked officers for the comprehensive presentation.

A Member commented that, while the presentation was thorough, it highlighted the seriousness of the challenges ahead. Officers acknowledged that the risk register also identified potential opportunities, such as increased solar energy generation due to higher levels of UV radiation.

The Committee emphasised that:

- Adaptation measures must be complemented by continued mitigation efforts to reduce emissions
- Reliance solely on adaptation would not be sufficient to address long-term climate risks
- Transitioning away from fossil fuels would also improve resilience to global economic shocks

Members referenced historical examples of energy supply disruptions and noted the importance of moving towards sustainable energy sources.

In response to questions, officers confirmed that:

- Business Continuity Plans were reviewed annually

Members also discussed collaboration at county level and were advised that:

- The Council worked with partners through the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership

- Joint planning and emergency response arrangements were in place via the Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum
- Climate adaptation planning was increasingly being approached in a coordinated, multi-agency manner

It was further noted that future local government structures would require continued collaboration and integration of climate adaptation planning at a wider strategic level.

The Chair thanked officers for their work and presentation, noting that while the subject matter was challenging, it was essential for the Council to address. Officers welcomed further feedback from Members as the Plan progressed.

4 CABINET PORTFOLIO HOLDER RESPONSE TO REVIEW OF RECYCLING IN FLAT BLOCKS

The Committee considered the response to its review of recycling in flat blocks. Officers reported that the recommendation to introduce recycling champions had been supported, with an emphasis on effective recognition and improved data from combined kerbside collection vehicles.

Progress was noted on several initiatives, including the implementation of new food waste collections, the design and installation of clear pictorial signage in bin stores, and the introduction of simplified recycling systems for residents.

Additional accessibility measures, such as a braille signage option and narrated instructional videos, had also been delivered. The Committee further noted that mobile CCTV at bring bank sites would be reviewed alongside wider enforcement measures, with hotspot locations to be identified, and that proposals for locations such as Vardon Road flats would be considered as part of the wider improvement programme, including resident consultation and potential use of recycling bags.

The Committee also noted measures to address fly tipping, including the installation of locks on bin stores and the introduction of three wheeled bins where practical.

Members sought clarification regarding the differing delivery timescales for bin stickers and signage. Officers advised that the current flat block improvement programme would be rolled out over the coming months and would ensure that the council was compliant in terms of food waste recycling; and future flat block improvements over phases would see improvements to signage, stickers and bins in other locations as part of a longer term initiative. The first phase is expected to be completed by late summer.

The Committee welcomed the detailed responses and noted the update.

5 UPDATE ON DELIVERY OF THE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2025-26

The Committee considered the Work Programme for 2025–2026. Members noted the items completed during the current year, including the review of waste and recycling and ongoing work relating to the climate change emergency. It was further noted that some items had not been progressed due to time constraints, and that

previous considerations had included cycling and several one-off topics. The Chair invited Members to propose items for inclusion in the 2026-2027 Work Programme. It was suggested that the enforcement of fly-tipping should form a key area of focus, reflecting concerns raised in previous discussions. Members indicated general agreement with this proposal, and no alternative topics were put forward.

It was noted that fly-tipping be included as the primary item within the Committee's Work Programme for 2026–2027.

The Committee received a reminder from officers that the action tracker would be presented to the Committee during the Summer. This would enable Members to review progress against previous recommendations and determine whether further scrutiny or follow-up work was required. It was noted that the tracker would also be updated to remove outdated items and ensure continued relevance.

It was RESOLVED that the action tracker would be refreshed and brought back to a future meeting for review.

6 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part I Business

7 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Not required.

8 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR