

COUNCIL – 22 JULY 2026

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Questions to Portfolio Holders / Committee Chairs

(A) Question from Councillor Peter Wilkins

With the introduction of food waste collection and the completion of phase 2 of the flat block recycling scheme in the Borough can the council advise what our current recycling rate is (expressed as a percentage of all waste recycled.)

Answer (Councillor Rob Broom):

Waste and recycling data is reported through WasteDataFlow, the national reporting system used by local authorities to submit verified waste data to Government.

Due to the reporting and validation process, data is typically available around three months in arrears and, as a result, we are not yet in a position to report the full impact of the borough-wide food waste service or the completion of Phase 2 of the flats recycling programme within the official recycling rate. Once the validated data is available, we will of course share it.

However, what I can say is that Stevenage's overall recycling rate stood at approximately 38% for 2025/26, and there are already encouraging signs that our major investment in recycling services is having a positive impact.

The successful introduction of weekly food waste collections earlier this year was one of the largest changes to the Council's waste service in decades. It required extensive planning and preparation, including the procurement of new collection vehicles, the distribution of new food waste bins and caddies to households across the borough, the recruitment and training of additional collection crews, and a significant communications campaign. I would particularly like to recognise the fantastic support from local schools, which helped raise awareness amongst families and played an important role in encouraging residents to embrace the new service.

The launch itself was delivered successfully and on schedule, which was a significant achievement. Nationally, around a quarter of councils due to introduce food waste collections did not manage to go live when planned, making Stevenage's successful implementation all the more noteworthy.

Early indications are positive. Recent participation surveys show that 52% of households are regularly presenting a food waste bin for collection, which represents a strong starting point for a completely new service. The completion of Phase 2 of the flats recycling programme is also helping to make recycling easier and more accessible for more residents across the borough.

While we are pleased with this level of engagement, we are ambitious to go further. Increasing recycling rates remains a key priority for the Council and we will continue working with residents, schools, community groups and partners to maximise participation, reduce waste and improve environmental outcomes for the town.

I look forward to reporting back once the validated data is available and demonstrating the full impact these improvements are having on Stevenage's recycling performance.

(B) Question from Councillor Andy McGuinness

To date, what has been the impact of this year's inclement weather on the Council's planned schedule of environmental maintenance including weeding, grass cutting and hedge/tree pruning?

Answer: (Councillor Rob Broom)

Due to the warmer weather, grass growth has slowed, allowing resources to be redirected to other landscape maintenance activities, including hedge cutting and shrub bed pruning.

There has been no noticeable increase in weed growth, and routine weed control treatments are continuing as planned, with two treatments scheduled annually.

During periods of extreme heat, operational teams have adjusted their working hours and commenced work earlier in the day. This has enabled staff to complete the majority of their tasks before temperatures reach their peak in the mid to late afternoon, helping to maintain productivity while supporting staff wellbeing and safety.

(C) Question from Councillor Phil Bibby

Would the Cabinet Member please advise how fuel inflation caused by the Iranian conflict is affecting the Council's spending against budget

Answer (Councillor Tom Plater):

Fuel prices have experienced some volatility during the first quarter of the financial year, reflecting wider economic conditions and fluctuations in global energy markets. While international events, including tensions in the Middle East, have contributed to uncertainty in fuel markets, the impact on the Council's finances has so far been limited and remains manageable.

The Council's budgeted fuel price across both the General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is approximately £1.79 per litre. Current prices are around £1.78 per litre, which is broadly in line with budget assumptions. Although the average fuel price since 1 April has been approximately £1.86 per litre, with a peak of £1.982 per litre during the first

week of April, the combined year-to-date impact on Council budgets is currently estimated at around £6,000.

As part of the Quarter 1 budget monitoring process, a prudent provision of £30,000 has been included to reflect a potential worst-case scenario should fuel prices rise again during the remainder of the year. However, prices have stabilised in recent weeks and, if that trend continues, it is unlikely that the full provision will be required.

The position will continue to be closely monitored and any significant changes will be reported through the Council's regular budget monitoring arrangements

(D) Question from Councillor Robin Parker

There are many publicly accessible automatic external defibrillators (AEDs) at locations in Stevenage. Some are free standing, whilst others are attached to buildings. Many of these were provided by local Borough or County Councillors via SBC Local Community Budgets (LCBs) or HCC Locality Budgets (LBs). Others are private and did not involve SBC or HCC.

I understand that the Neighbourhood Wardens check them regularly, which is excellent.

In the case of those provided by LCBs or LBs, what are the arrangements for funding:

- repairs to them;
- maintenance of them;
- replacements of them;
-if such actions become necessary?

Answer: (Councillor Nazmin Chowdhury)

The Council recognises the important contribution that publicly accessible Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) make in helping to save lives across our communities. Many of the AEDs installed in Stevenage have been funded through Borough Councillors' Local Community Budgets (LCBs), Hertfordshire County Council Locality Budgets (LBs), community groups and local businesses, reflecting a strong partnership approach to improving public safety.

The Council's Neighbourhood Wardens carry out regular visual checks of AEDs across the town and report any issues that require attention. For 2026/27, the Council has secured £2,500 of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding to support the repair and maintenance of AEDs where this becomes necessary. This funding will help ensure that existing units remain operational and available for public use.

At present, there is no dedicated replacement programme in place. The cost of replacing an AED is approximately £2,000 for an electrically powered unit and £3,500 for a solar-powered installation. Where a replacement is required, Members will be invited to consider support through their Local Community Budgets and the Council will also work with local businesses, community

organisations and other partners to secure contributions towards replacement and ongoing maintenance costs.

This collaborative approach has been successful in expanding the network of AEDs across Stevenage and will continue to be used to help ensure these vital community assets remain available for residents.

(E) Question from Councillor Ashley-Wren

Since March 2023 when the Council took over the management of the lakes sailing courses have remained inactive.

Are there plans to reinstate this provision that provided residents, including many young people, with opportunities to experience activities that they may otherwise not be able to access.?

Answer: (Councillor Arceno)

Sailing courses at Fairlands Valley Park ceased in 2019 while the facility was managed by the previous leisure operator, Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL), reflecting a significant decline in demand for sailing activities over a number of years.

Since the Council resumed direct management of the facility in 2023, we have explored opportunities to reintroduce sailing and have approached a number of sailing organisations and clubs across Hertfordshire to gauge interest in using the lake. To date, none have expressed an interest in establishing sailing activity at the site.

In the meantime, the Council has focused on broadening the range of water-based activities available to residents. Working with AquaParcs, we now offer activities including kayaking, paddleboarding and the inflatable obstacle course, all of which have proved popular and provide accessible opportunities for people of all ages to get active on the water.

In addition, the Council has enabled the Stevenage Sea Cadets to make regular use of the lake. Prior to 2023, access had been limited due to cost, but the revised arrangements now provide more opportunities for young people to develop confidence, teamwork and practical skills through water-based activities.

While there are currently no plans to reinstate Council-run sailing courses, we will continue to keep the position under review and would actively consider any sustainable proposals that demonstrate sufficient demand and a viable delivery model. Our priority remains ensuring that Fairlands Valley Park offers a wide range of accessible and well-used outdoor and water-based activities for local residents.

(F) Question from Councillor Clark

What actions did the Council take during recent periods of extreme heat to support council tenants, including older people, those with health conditions, and those at increased risk from heat-related illness?

Answer: (Councillor Loraine Rossati)

During the recent periods of extreme heat, the Council took a proactive approach to supporting council tenants, particularly older residents, those with underlying health conditions, and others who may have been more vulnerable to heat-related illness.

Within our Independent Living schemes, staff followed the UK Health Security Agency's Heat Health Alert guidance and significantly increased welfare support. This included additional wellbeing calls, welfare visits and regular check-ins to ensure residents were safe, well, and receiving any support they needed during the hottest periods.

Across the heat alert periods in May, June and July, the team made 2,405 additional resident contacts, completed 81 additional welfare visits, responded to 305 emergency calls, and carried out 49 additional weekend and bank holiday welfare checks. Staff also worked closely with residents to adjust activities where necessary during periods of extreme heat and ensured access to cooler communal areas where appropriate.

I would like to place on record my thanks to all of the Council's staff who went above and beyond to support residents during this period. Their commitment, professionalism and compassion helped ensure that some of our most vulnerable tenants remained safe, supported and connected throughout the heatwaves.

More widely, the Council used its website, social media channels and Customer Service Centre to share public health advice, encouraging residents to stay hydrated, keep cool and look out for neighbours who may be vulnerable. The Council also promoted water safety messages to help reduce the risks associated with swimming in open water during hot weather.

These actions reflect the Council's commitment to protecting vulnerable residents and supporting community wellbeing during periods of extreme weather

(G) Question from Councillor Jaysica Marvell

Many residents rely on council services or receive financial support at different stages of their lives, whether through social housing, council tax support, or other benefits and assistance. While these services provide an essential safety net, they're not always intended to be a permanent solution. There may also be people who aspire to become more financially independent where circumstances allow.

What is Stevenage Borough Council doing, either directly or in partnership with other organisations, to support residents on that journey by improving access to employment, skills, training, financial advice, business support and opportunities that promote greater independence and social mobility?

Answer: (Councillor Coleen De Freitas)

Supporting residents to improve their skills, access employment and achieve greater financial independence is a key priority for the Cabinet and is reflected within our Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan.

The Council's approach is underpinned by the Stevenage Works Skills Framework, which identifies where local intervention can make the greatest difference, including supporting young people in education, adults who face barriers to employment, and those looking to retrain, upskill or progress their careers. The framework is also aligned to the sectors that offer the greatest opportunities for local residents, including STEM, life sciences, advanced manufacturing, construction, health and social care.

Over the past five years, the Council has secured approximately £3.5 million of external funding to support enterprise, skills and employability initiatives in Stevenage. This investment has enabled a range of targeted programmes, events and interventions designed to help residents access training, employment and career progression opportunities.

One of the flagship programmes is Pioneering Young STEM Futures, delivered through our partnership with Mission 44. Phase Two commenced in September 2025 and is supported by £1.1 million of funding over five years. The programme is being delivered across every primary and secondary school in Stevenage and aims to inspire thousands of young people to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Through partnerships with organisations such as Airbus, young people are being introduced to opportunities in engineering, space, defence and the life sciences sector, helping to raise aspirations and improve long-term social mobility.

The Council also leads Stevenage Works, a partnership between Stevenage Borough Council, North Hertfordshire College and Jobcentre Plus. Through Stevenage Works, we ensure that the economic benefits arising from regeneration, housing investment and major construction projects are translated into tangible opportunities for local people, including jobs, apprenticeships, work experience placements and vocational training. Building on that success, we have also launched a Health and Social Care Pilot, with the first cohorts now successfully completed, helping residents access careers within one of the region's most important growth sectors.

Alongside these initiatives, we are increasing our focus on adults who are out of work, economically inactive, or facing barriers to employment. This includes support for residents seeking to retrain, change career or build new skills in response to a changing economy. Through partnerships with local, countywide and national organisations, we continue to provide access to

employment support, skills programmes, careers advice, business support and financial inclusion initiatives, building on the foundations established through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Together, this work is helping to create clearer pathways into education, training and employment, ensuring that more residents can benefit from the opportunities being generated by Stevenage's growth. By connecting people with the skills, support and opportunities they need to succeed, we are helping residents build greater independence, improve their life chances and contribute to the continued prosperity of our town

(H) Question from Councillor Tom Wren

The recent announcement of £20m of Pride of Place funding is fantastic news for the St Nicholas neighbourhood. What plans does the council have to deliver much needed improvements in the other areas of the town?

Answer: (Councillor Richard Henry)

It is indeed fantastic news to see such significant investment coming into Stevenage. The £20 million Pride in Place award provides an opportunity to make a real and lasting difference in St. Nicholas over a ten-year period. It represents a step change in the way place-based investment is being approached, moving away from smaller amounts of funding spread across wider areas over shorter periods and instead focusing substantial, long-term investment in communities with significant local need to support lasting generational change.

St. Nicholas was identified through a national process, using the methodology set out in the fund's publicly available prospectus. Neighbourhoods were assessed using a combination of the Index of Multiple Deprivation and the Community Needs Index, considering factors including access to services, community infrastructure, civic participation and community cohesion. Although we would all welcome this level of investment being available across more of Stevenage, funding of this scale can only support a limited number of places nationally.

Alongside Pride in Place, the Council continues to secure and invest funding that benefits neighbourhoods across the town. Members will remember that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund was allocated across Stevenage and supported locally identified priorities through our Co-operative Neighbourhoods programme. We also continue to invest through Local Community Budgets, which enable ward councillors and residents to deliver local projects, the Climate Change Community Fund, which supports community-led environmental initiatives, and Community Infrastructure Levy funding, which helps provide local infrastructure and neighbourhood improvements.

This neighbourhood investment sits alongside a much broader programme of delivery across Stevenage. The Council's Annual Report, considered by Cabinet on 15 July, looks back at what we delivered during 2025/26 and sets

out 70 strategic priorities for the year ahead. These include continued investment in our council housing stock, building more social and affordable homes, exploring further opportunities for neighbourhood regeneration and progressing our ambitious town centre regeneration programme, including the new Sports and Leisure Centre, ensuring investment continues to benefit communities across the whole town.