

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday 11 January 2017

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Members: S Mead (Chair), M Notley (Vice-Chair),
D Bainbridge, J Brown, E Connolly, J Mead,
A Mitchell, C Saunders and G Snell

In Attendance:

Start/End Time: Start Time: 6:00 pm
End Time: 6.50 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor E Harrington.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair invited Members to join her in a moment's reflection for Councillor Sherma Batson who had passed away suddenly on 8 January 2017. The Chair also welcomed Councillor Snell to his first meeting back since the recent sad passing of his wife.

2. MINUTES – 29 NOVEMBER 2016

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Community Select Committee held on 29 November 2016 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. REVIEW OF DAMP, MOULD AND CONDENSATION IN STEVENAGE HOUSING STOCK

The Committee received a report detailing the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review into Damp, Mould and Condensation into Stevenage Housing Stock.

The Committee was reminded of the scope and focus of the review which included consideration of the following areas:

- To establish the number of properties within the Stevenage Council Housing stock that suffer from damp and mould;
- Establish if there was a root cause that had been identified for damp and mould in Stevenage Council Homes, such as building construction; ventilation; how well the property was heated?
- Look at what measures were currently taken to alleviate the problem of damp and mould in Council properties – What programme of

- works were there to address this problem;
- What advice and measures did the Council provide to tenants who suffered from damp and mould;
 - Could the Council provide a dehumidifier to Council tenants;
 - What checks were carried out on the Council's housing stock for problems of damp and mould;

Following consideration of the report Members made the following comments:

- **Recommendation 2** – In relation to staff training, officers advised that all those officers coming into contact with tenants would receive the training required in this area. It was also suggested that an additional sentence should be added to ensure the Tenant Feedback Forms were redesigned to include the issue of damp and mould.
- **Recommendation 3** – to be reworded to remove the words 'tackle this maintenance issue in its Housing Stock' and replace with 'to record the number of properties with damp and mould for accurate analysis';
- **Recommendation 5** – Following a debate, it was agreed that subject to the complexity of the repair, an initial target of 3 weeks be set as the response time to carry out the first inspection of a property followed by a 6 month target period for resolution of the issue. There should also be a flagging mechanism in place for those repairs which took longer than 6 months.
- **Recommendation 6** – Officers were requested to reword the paragraph into shorter sentences;

Members also requested that if possible an update on the recommendations come back to the Committee before the Annual Meeting of Council in May 2017.

It was **RESOLVED**

1. That the Community Select Committee considers the findings of the review, contained within this report and the recommendations below be presented to the Portfolio Holder and the Strategic Director (Community) and that a response be provided from these and any other named officers and partners within two months of the publishing of this report. In addition, the Community Select Committee will consider an update report on the performance of the service following improved monitoring arrangements and delivery of the Damp and Condensation Strategy (which largely was instigated a result of the review investigation) in the autumn of 2017.
2. That officers who come into contact with people who report damp, mould and condensation all undergo adequate training to mitigate some of the previous inappropriate initial responses to tenants, this training to include moving away from the previous default position of citing tenants lifestyle as the primary cause of damp, mould and

condensation in properties. Officers must demonstrate a sympathetic approach to tenants who report problems with damp and mould, following a corporate, agreed script. The Tenant Feedback Form should also be redesigned to include the issue of damp and mould.

3. As part of a communications strategy to promote the new damp and condensation strategy, officers should invite tenants to come forward with current and historical cases of damp and mould to help the authority to record the number of properties with damp and mould for accurate analysis. This data to then be recorded/classified for stock condition data.
4. That the issue of damp and mould be included in housing matters events publicising how tenants can mitigate the effects of damp and mould in their properties, this should be linked to a Communications campaign with appropriate information and reporting on the web site. Tenants who suffer from this problem need to know it's appropriate to highlight concerns (and expect that something will be done about it where possible) and they should also know what to expect with transparent procedures in place.
5. That officers all work to an agreed timeframe for responding to reports of damp and mould from the initial response and for a realistic timeframe for resolving these issues. An initial target of 3 weeks be set as the response time to carry out an initial inspection and a 6 month target period be set for resolution to the issue, subject to the complexity of the repair. There should also be a flagging mechanism in place for those repairs taking longer than 6 months.
6. That through the HRA Budget process appropriate levels of resources are allocated to invest in repairs to alleviate cases of damp and mould. Specific housing blocks that officers are aware that suffer from structural defaults and cause these conditions, are systematically worked on to alleviate the problems, with particular emphasis during the void process. This would avoid subsequent complaints issues.
7. That officers record the problems and state the process of repair following the first visit and identify the cause rather than the symptom to be addressed.
8. That officers establish a tangible system of recording data which illustrates the priority/severity of each case.
9. We recommend that a system of allocating serial number/case number/ customer/property unique number reference be used to record first time complaints to avoid follow up complaints being logged individually and to avoid customer/tenants having to re-explain case/issue.

10. That the housing department recognises the impact of damp and mould on people with respiratory conditions, particularly those with young children and the elderly, and this be considered as part of the planned forthcoming Housing Allocation Policy review

4. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None

5. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required

6. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR