STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 4 September 2018
Time: 6.00pm
Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present:	**Councillors:** Sarah Mead (Chair), Adam Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair), Sandra Barr, Jim Brown, Liz Harrington, Roni Hearn, John Mead, Sarah-Jane Potter and Simon Speller
In attendance:	Councillor Rob Broom (Executive Portfolio Holder – Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working)
Start / End Time:	Start Time: 6.00pm End Time: 7.45pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies were received from Councillor T Wren.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the Minutes of the Community Select Committee (CSC) meeting held on 4 July 2018 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to amending all references of "Fairland Valley" in Item 5 to "Fairlands Valley".

2. That the Minutes of the Community Select Committee (CSC) meeting held on 12 July 2018 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT SCRUTINY REVIEW - PRESENTATION**

The Chair welcomed Rachel Eden (Holy Brook Associates) who had been engaged to support the Community Engagement review. Rachel provided the Committee with a report and presentation outlining the Council's the current community engagement approach and recommended steps to improve community engagement activity. The report for the period up to March 2018 followed a review and analysis of community engagement across Stevenage. Rachel felt that the Council already took community engagement seriously and some teams demonstrated a mature understanding of the importance of the topic.

Case studies included in the research revealed that there were good relationships between residents and officers. However, there were notable barriers to maximising

the benefits of communication and engagement with the community. These included the need to improve digital access channels to enable online sharing and tools / measures to evidence the progress of communication and how engagement made a difference. It was observed that there was occasionally a lack of pace in community engagement and the Council could be reactive rather than proactive on some projects.

The report highlighted that it should be standard practice to consider community engagement requirements and benefits with regards to relevant policies and developments and that stakeholders should be asked to contribute when drafting engagement plans. Members, residents and officers should be encouraged to explore community engagement options and build relationships with residents including those who live elsewhere but work in the Borough.

The consultant recommended that the Council:

• Creates a community engagement toolkit that included case studies, contacts, checklists and templates
• Integrates communications planning into community engagement work
• Works to agree and implement a set of measures for effective engagement
• Expands the approach to people not currently involved in community engagement

The Executive Portfolio Holder (Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working) informed Members that the Council is working hard to improve the information technology (IT) infrastructure. There were plans to provide a consultation platform on the SBC website and to make the website more user-friendly.

An informal poll of 53 residents that was carried out by the Chair revealed the following:

• The majority of those polled contact the Council by telephone
• The Council website and Comet were the main sources of information for the respondents
• None of the young respondents were aware that the Chronicle was a Council publication
• The respondents contacted the Council primarily about refuse collection, parking, shops and town centre regeneration

It was acknowledged that due to the community engagement methodologies used, the views of a significant number of the Borough's demographics were excluded from the Stevenage residents' survey and Members' informal surveys. Members indicated that the Council appeared to be slow in embracing some of the new community engagement tools. Members felt there was a risk that residents perceive some consultations are designed to suit pre-determined Council objectives. It was noted that informal community engagement such as the use of social media and community events was beneficial to residents, Members and officers.

Members were asked by the Chair to highlight their key recommendations for consideration in relation to this review. Members recommended that:

1. The Council's information technology (IT) system be upgraded and the website be revamped

2. The Council provides micro-websites for Wards with details such as outstanding community actions

3. The Council commissions community-driven applications (apps) and social media tools such as Twitter surveys and increases the use of mobile devices

4. The Council considers digital engagement via touchscreens and other devices at Council offices and in the town centre

5. Members and officers improve face-to-face engagement with residents and manage expectations of residents during community engagement work

6. The Council integrates communications planning into community engagement work for each business unit

7. The Council decentralises community engagement to individual business units and sub-units

8. Customer feedback method used by the Repairs & Voids team be rolled out to other Council services

9. The Council widens the base for consultations so as to reflect the demographics of the Borough

10. The Council puts in place measures to demonstrate the benefits and effectiveness of community engagement

11. Formal Council reports include community engagement as part of the criteria for sign off at officer and Member level

12. The Council increases the number of neighbourhood wardens to at least one per county council electoral division

13. The Council creates a community engagement toolkit to enable Members and officers to follow a standard approach to community engagement

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Stevenage Community Engagement Report is noted

2. The recommendations made by Members be included in the Executive Portfolio Holder response to the Community Engagement Review

4   **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

5   **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

6   **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR