

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday, 29 February 2024

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

**Present:** Councillors: Julie Ashley-Wren, Forhad Chowdhury, John Duncan, Wendy Kerby, Conor McGrath, Ellie Plater and Carolina Veres.

**Start / End** Start Time: 6.00pm  
**Time:** End Time: 7.05pm

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

**Election of Chair for the meeting**

In the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair the Scrutiny Officer invited the Committee to nominate a Chair for the meeting. Cllr Conor McGrath proposed and Cllr Forhad Chowdhury duly seconded and it was **RESOLVED** that Cllr Ellie Plater be elected Chair for the meeting.

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Sarah Mead (Chair), Alex Farquharson (Vice Chair) and Mason Humberstone.

There were no declarations of interest.

**2 MINUTES - 8 JANUARY 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Community Select Committee held on 8 January 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**3 COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2024-25**

The Chair invited the Scrutiny Officer, Stephen Weaver, to provide some detail on the issues that Members had raised as potential scrutiny review items for the 2024-25 Municipal Year:

The Scrutiny Officer explained that the items suggested for inclusion in the work programme could be matters that would be suitable for a main review, a one-off update on past reviews or a one-off performance review at an individual meeting. In addition to this, the Committee would be invited to undertake a number of pre-scrutiny policy development items ahead of their consideration at the Executive. The Scrutiny Officer drew Members attention to a document that had been tabled at the meeting which detailed the Chair's comments regarding suggested work programme items and a few more suggestions that had been received since the original agenda

papers had been circulated, which were detailed in the report at paragraph 5.

The Committee reviewed the suggestions that Members had provided as follows:

(1) Housing Engagement

The Strategic Director, Richard Protheroe, informed Members that TPAS, an independent Tenant Engagement expert, were working with the Council on a new engagement strategy. There would be an opportunity for the Committee to provide some policy development pre-scrutiny for this area of work.

(2) Housing Investment

The Strategic Director advised Members that regarding the revised Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan & revised asset management strategy, that Officer would be happy to provide Members with an update on what are the key deliverables for these programmes. An update could be provided from the Summer onwards.

Members welcomed receiving an update on the various elements to Housing Investment including the decent homes programme, the major repairs contract and on one-off repairs.

(3) Independent Living (Sheltered Housing)

The Scrutiny Officer explained the background to the suggested scrutiny work programme item and briefly referred to the Chair's response to the suggestion.

The Strategic Director advised that this is now referred to as Independent Living and clarified that extra care provision is commissioned and funded by Hertfordshire County Council.

The Strategic Director agreed to provide a briefing note to Members outlining the various care elements provided, who supplies the service and what is available to residents.

(4) Review the impact of the new Housing Allocations Policy

The Strategic Director informed Members that the revised Housing Allocations Policy had not yet been implemented and is due to be launched in July 2024. The full impact of the new scheme would not be known until a 12-month cycle is completed.

A member suggested that the public don't fully understand the current allocations scheme and would need help to see how the new scheme would operate. The Strategic Director agreed that Officers could advise the Committee on the steps being taken to communicate the new scheme.

(5) Equalities & Diversity

The Strategic Director updated Members on equalities and diversity activity. The

Council had supported the Equalities Commission in recent times and was planning legacy actions.

The Equalities Commission identified the need for great support to the voluntary sector and people at a grass roots level to encourage greater community cohesion, including events. However, there was currently a Member task and finish group working specifically on events and how these are linked to Equalities & Diversity, so it would be best not to have a specific topic on the diversity of events to avoid the possibility of duplication.

Regarding how the Council can strengthen community cohesion, Members were informed that there was a Legacy Group following on from the Equalities Commission. It was suggested that it would be sensible to discuss this issue with the Legacy Group to find out what their aims and objectives were and to see how the Committee could work with them and the Social Inclusion Partnership to see what areas Members could develop and assist on.

A Member suggested that communications with some minorities in the town had recently slipped. The example given was with the local Bangladeshi Community who appeared to have stopped receiving invitations to various civic events. It was stated that it was good to keep encouraging representatives from ethnic minority groups to attend events as this helped maintain good community cohesion.

Members requested that the Council's Equalities Officer be invited to a future CSC meeting to provide a PowerPoint presentation to CSC Members regarding who does what in relation to promoting Equalities and Diversity and good community cohesion.

The Chair of the Committee, Cllr Sarah Mead had stated in her briefing note to Members that she was keen to consider this as a main review item.

#### (6) Neighbourhood Wardens

The Scrutiny Officer reminded Members of the presentation that the Committee received regarding the work of the Neighbourhood Wardens during the Covid Pandemic. It was suggested and agreed that Officers should bring a further one-off update on the work of the Neighbourhood Wardens to the Committee.

#### (7) Community Centres

The Strategic Director reminded Members that the current policy was to operate a 'fix on fail' strategy, this made sense financially within the resources available to the Council. However, this was not sustainable in the long run. The Strategic Director stated that the Council was devising a medium to long term plan for the Council's estate.

A Bedwell Ward Member suggested that Community Associations were perhaps reluctant to do things with the buildings they occupy due to uncertainty. The Strategic Director recommended that the Chair of the Committee meet up with the Strategic Director and Statutory Section 151 Officer with responsibility for the Council's Finances regarding how the Committee might engage on this issue. There

could be a possibility of some Policy Development Pre-Scrutiny but it would have to be conducted within a part II confidential meeting given the financial and commercially sensitive nature of the subject.

#### (8) Update on new Leisure Contract

The Strategic Director suggested that the new Leisure Provider, Everyone Active could certainly provide Members with a presentation. It was suggested that Everyone Active & the Council's Health and Wellbeing Officer be invited to attend a meeting and provide an update presentation to Members.

#### Statutory Crime & Disorder Committee and Standing item on Public Health

The Scrutiny Officer drew Member's attention to two extra items that were not included in the Members work programme suggestions. These included a Statutory item when the Committee sits as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee and a standing item on Public Health. The Scrutiny Officer reminded Members of the benefits the Council has seen since meeting regularly with the County Council's Director of Public Health, leading to financial support for the Council's Healthy Hub initiative which has been replicated around the County.

Members were keen to keep the good relations with the new Director of Public Health, Sarah Perman. The Strategic Director suggested that a focus could be on the Integrated Care Network. There had been a lot of work done across the County from Public Health regarding links with Herts and West Essex Integrated Care Board, along with the North & East Hertfordshire NHS Trust.

The Strategic Director advised that a new Healthy Stevenage Strategy is to be developed in conjunction with the local Primary Care Networks and the Committee could help inform future priorities. It is still at a very early process, so officers would need to see when it would be a good time to timetable policy development work with the Committee.

The Strategic Director suggested to Members that they could take a more in-depth look at Community Safety matters as a main review item. The Committee has a statutory role to sit at least once a year to consider Crime and Disorder, and the Committee could focus in on areas of concern if it felt there was a need.

#### It was **RESOLVED**

1. that the Scrutiny Members' feedback on ideas for improving Scrutiny be noted;
2. (i) that having considered the ideas put forward by individual Scrutiny Members, the Committee determines the matters to be added to a work programme of potential Scrutiny review items for 2024-25 as follows:
  - Housing Engagement – provide some pre-scrutiny policy development prior to a report to the Executive in 2024-25
  - Housing Investment – Members to receive an update on the various

elements to Housing Investment including the decent homes programme, the major repairs contract and on one-off repairs.

- Independent Living (Sheltered Accommodation) - The Strategic Director agreed to provide a briefing note to Members outlining the various care elements provided, who supplies the service and what is available to residents.
- Review the impact of the new Housing Allocations Policy – The Strategic Director agreed to instruct Officers to provide a report on the overview of the communications plans with the public on the new Housing Allocations Policy before it is delivered in July 2024.
- Equalities & Diversity - The Council's Equalities Officer be invited to a future CSC meeting to provide a PowerPoint presentation to CSC Members regarding who does what in relation to promoting Equalities and Diversity and good community cohesion. Following the presentation and liaison with the Equalities Commission Legacy Group a scope for a review could be brought back to the Committee for consideration.
- Neighbourhood Warden - Officers should bring a one-off update on the work of the Neighbourhood Wardens to the Committee.
- Community Centres - The Chair of the Committee to meet up with the Strategic Director and Statutory Section 151 Officer with responsibility for the Council's Finances regarding how the Committee might engage on this issue.
- Update on the new Leisure Contract performance - Everyone Active & the Council's Health and Wellbeing Officer be invited to attend a meeting and provide an update presentation to Members.
- Statutory Crime & Disorder Committee and Standing item on Public Health – That these items be scheduled into the Committee's work programme for the year, with a view to work with HCC Public Health lead and partners in various NHS governance groups to develop a joint health strategy document for an Integrated Care Network for the area as a piece of pre-scrutiny policy development.

(ii) that the Chair will consider the above suggestions made by the Committee and devise a draft work programme schedule that will be shared with the Committee when it meets in the new Municipal Year in June 2024, comprising a main scrutiny review item(s), one-off focused meetings or individual committee item updates.

3. that the process to carry out pre-scrutiny policy development work be noted.

#### 4 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

#### 5 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. That the reasons for the following reports being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

6 **PART II MINUTES - 8 JANUARY 2024**

It was **RESOLVED**:

That the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Monday 8 January 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

**CHAIR**