

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday 26 September 2017

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: S Mead (Chair), J Brown, E Connolly, L Harrington, J Mead, A Mitchell CC and G Snell.

Start/End Time: Start Time: 6:00 pm
End Time: 7:30 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Bainbridge, M Notley and C Saunders.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – 13 JULY 2017

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Community Select Committee held on 13 July 2017 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. HOUSING ALLOCATIONS REVIEW

The Committee interviewed a tenant who had recently moved from sheltered accommodation to a general needs bungalow.

The tenant presented a well-chronicled diary of events detailing how her case had been handled by the Council.

Following clarification of several points raised by the tenant several potential areas for improvement and further investigation were identified. These included provision of a checklist for actions to be undertaken, inclusion of Direct Debit forms and the need for phone messages to be returned.

Officers advised the Committee that checklists were available for tenant transfers within both the Sheltered Schemes or General Needs but it was uncertain whether such a list existed for transfers between schemes.

The tenant advised the Committee that her case had been accelerated via the use of the Council's 'Direct List' which enabled the most urgent cases to be actioned.

In reply to a question the Committee was advised that the Direct List was administered by the Sheltered Housing Team and was reserved for the most urgent cases. It was stressed that the Direct List was not a method of queue jumping.

The Chair requested that issues raised by the tenant be tested with the Sheltered Housing Team.

The Committee then heard from the Lettings Advisor who detailed the process that a tenant would be taken through prior to moving into a property.

In reply to a question concerning the verification process for applicants to the housing waiting list the Committee was advised that a check on eligibility was made on initial application and further checks on criteria such as local connections, rent accounts and Anti-Social Behaviour records made once the applicant had bid for a property.

In reply to a further question the Committee was advised that a full list of eligibility criteria was not published on the Council's website however certain debaring factors, such as the applicant having substantial rent arrears, were published.

A Member raised the issue of gas safety checks and the Committee was advised that such checks could only be carried out once a tenant had moved into a property. In the example given the check had led to the condemning of the boiler and, although technically outside of the scope of this review, the Committee requested that consideration be given to reviewing the gas safety check process so that tenants could be assured that the property would be safe to move into.

The Committee then received a presentation from the Empty Homes Manager giving details requested at a previous meeting.

In response to a Member request the Officer undertook to provide numbers of properties let by banding for Quarters 1 and 2.

The presentation identified three areas that required further consideration:

1. The issue of 18 year olds signing onto the housing waiting list despite not being in immediate need of housing
2. Those classified as under occupiers being classed as 'no priority' for rehousing
3. Persons inadvertently coming off the waiting list by moving into areas of the town outside the boundaries of the Borough (Great Ashby)

The issue of misleading information being given to unsuccessful applicants using the Choice Based Lettings scheme was discussed. Members were of the belief that some applicants were being advised that they were close to the top of the waiting list and would be offered a property in the near future.

An officer highlighted the point that applicants may be informed of their position with regards to a particular property they had bid for. The Chair requested that Members collect evidence of this to feedback to Officers.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following points be noted to signpost potential and emerging recommendations from the review:

- Provision of Direct Debit forms for movers
- Confirm the position regarding the provision of a chronological checklist for tenants that transfer between properties, especially those that transfer from Sheltered Accommodation to General Needs or vice versa
- The ongoing need for robust communications with tenants at all stages of the process
- 18 year olds living at home signing onto the housing waiting list
- The priority given to under occupiers wishing to downsize their properties
- A review of the local connection criteria for persons moving into areas such as Great Ashby whilst on the housing waiting list
- Communication with tenants concerning their position on the waiting list, particularly after an unsuccessful bid through the Choice Based Lettings process.

4. REVISED ALLOCATIONS REVIEW SCOPING DOCUMENT

The Scrutiny Officer presented the revised scoping document for the review.

The Chair requested that the Assistant Director Housing and Investment make a presentation to the Committee to outline how undertaking the Housing Under One Roof Programme Transformation programme should positively impact on the application of the Housing Allocations Policy.

It was **RESOLVED** that the revised scoping document is noted.

5. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None

6. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required

7. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR