

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 19 November 2014

Time: 18.00 hrs.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: S Mead (Chair), M Notley (Vice-Chair), L Bell, R Broom, M Gardner, E Harrington and P Stuart.

Also Present Ken Staunton (National Landlords' Association)

Start/End Time: Start Time: 18.00 hrs.
End Time: 19:35 hrs.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors E Connolly, A McGuinness and J Mead

There were no declarations of interests.

2. MINUTES – 10 NOVEMBER 2014

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE LOCAL PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR – INTERVIEW SESSION

The Chair welcomed Mr Ken Staunton, Head of Regions, National Landlords' Association (NLA) to the meeting.

Mr Ken Staunton informed the meeting that the Association represented over 25,000 landlords and was currently the largest Landlords Association in the country with members paying an annual registration fee of £85 (£75 if on-line). He indicated that the Association lobbies Government on behalf of its members nationally and locally on issues affecting landlords. It also offers a number of services to its members such as on-line advice on Assured Short hold Tenancies, Business plans for first time or 1 property landlords, assisting members with paper work and a telephone advice service on tenancy legislation etc.

Mr Staunton welcomed the opportunity of developing a working relationship with the Council as it would promote best practice by landlords in the town and introduce professionalism to landlord activities. The meeting was informed that if associates were found not to abide by its code of practice they would be removed from the Association membership.

The Committee was informed that NLA also offered an Accreditation scheme which counted as 10 hours of Continuous Professional Development (CPD). This was free for its members who attended a 1 day training event covering topics such as how to undertake checks on tenants background; getting the paperwork right; inventories; tenancies; rights of entry; fire risk assessments; s21 notices and managing difficult tenants etc.

The meeting was informed that over 40% of NLA associates had experienced rent arrears in the last year and considering over 70% of its 25,000 associate members had only 1 property rent arrears would have a serious financial impact.

Members were advised that landlords in the private sector were aware of the challenges that the introduction of the universal credit posed on the rented sector especially as benefits were now expected to be paid directly to claimants rather than landlords.

Members posed a number of questions on how the NLA handled rogue landlords; retaliatory evictions and on issues around aids and adaptations especially for disabled tenants.

In response to a Member question, Mr Staunton acknowledged that the NLA regularly provided seminars on various housing related issues and had just completed a one day seminar for new letting landlords on how to develop strong business cases and contingencies for worst case scenarios.

The Strategic Housing Solutions Manager welcomed the input from the NLA and suggested that Council working with landlord associations would help foster a more professional pool of landlords locally.

In response to questions about the possibility of setting up Social Lettings Agencies (SLA), the Strategic Housing Solutions Manager stated that she was aware of local authorities setting up local lettings agencies and was currently in discussion with other Housing Officers about the feasibility of setting up such a scheme locally. However she advised that this would require a lot of planning and research especially with regards to local market conditions. She indicated that an outline feasibility study would be produced in the new year.

The Chair was concerned that residents were still unaware of the work of the Council and enquired if the Resident Involvement Groups could be utilised more effectively in imparting relevant information to tenants.

The Chair thanked Mr Staunton for his contribution to the review.

It was **RESOLVED**

1. That the views and contributions from the National Landlords' Association be noted
2. That the draft recommendations include the following:
 - I. That Resident Involvement Groups undertake a fresh awareness campaign, promoting the logo and purpose of the groups amongst local residents (of any tenure), this could be via an article in the Chronicle, the Council's Residents magazine.
 - II. That SBC endorse the work of National Landlords' Association and consider the possibility of promoting and hosting training sessions to encourage local landlords who are not associates to take up the advice and best practices regarding relationships with tenants, with the caveat that officers provide some more background information to Members on the NLA before embarking on any formal promotion or training with that group.
 - III. That Housing Officers consider providing some awareness training to tenants on their expectations when renting a property, to educate them and avoid possible pitfalls.
 - IV. That Officers consider undertaking an awareness campaign regarding the advice that Council Housing Officers provide to Stevenage residents for both private and social rented sector.
 - V. That the Committee welcome the Strategic Housing Solutions Manager offer of a feasibility study being undertaken into the local suitability of a social lettings agency and await with interest for its findings.

The Committee were informed that the draft recommendations would be circulated to Members for comment along with any further recommendations that the Scrutiny Officer derived from the previous sessions with agreement of the Chair and the Lead Officer for the review, along with a draft report which the Community Select Committee would be invited to sign off at a future Committee meeting.

4. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

5. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

PART II

6. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

Chair