

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Date: Monday 12 January 2015

Time: 18.00 hrs.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

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

Start/End Time: Start Time: 18.00 hrs.
End Time: 19.00 hrs.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors R Broom, E Connolly and A McGuinness.

There were no declarations of interests.

2. MINUTES – 9 DECEMBER 2014

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. UPDATE ON EXECUTIVE PORTFOLIO HOLDER RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee received an officer update to the Executive Portfolio Holder response to the Homelessness Review carried out by the Housing Development and Scrutiny Committee in June 2013.

The Committee was advised that the Council had undertaken a number of activities in respect of budget management to support benefits claimants prior to the introduction of Universal Credit. A Member commented that this work had not been adequately reflected in the update to recommendation 2.

The Chair questioned why the update under recommendation 3 stated that the funding for the women's refuge had ceased. The Officer advised that the funding to the refuge had been in the form of a 'one-off' grant to cover a specific financial issue and that the women's refuge had not approached the council for a renewed grant. However it was also noted that the level of in-kind support provided had a significant monetary value and that this support enabled the women's refuge to continue to operate.

Under recommendation 4 it was noted that membership of the Credit Union was promoted by the Council wherever possible and that monies had been made available to the Union for publicity events through the Local Community Budget scheme. In reply to a request the Strategic Director (Community) undertook to investigate methods of determining the effectiveness of the support given to the Credit Union.

In respect of the recommendations concerning the Councils Temporary Accommodation Strategy, the Committee was advised that the number of Private Sector Landlords accepting tenants receiving benefits had dropped by approximately 50% and that the Haven shelter was under redevelopment. These factors had combined to put pressure on the Housing Service and a new Homelessness Strategy was currently being prepared.

The Committee requested the opportunity to input into the Homeless Strategy. The Strategic Director (Community) undertook to arrange a Policy Development Meeting for Committee Members to consider the draft strategy before it was presented to the Executive.

It was **RESOLVED** that good progress against a number of the recommendations be acknowledged and the Committee requested that the update be rewritten in more detail, to include the following specific points raised at the meeting, for submission at a future meeting:

- Recommendation 2 – include the work undertaken to help clients manage their budget with the forthcoming change to monthly benefits payments under the Universal Credit regime.
- Recommendation 3 – amend the wording to reflect the fact that the funding to the women's refuge had been made as a 'one-off' grant and to note other support provided.
- Recommendation 5 – include details of the completion date of the Haven project, the ratio of places available for SBC and NHDC clients and details of any contingency arrangements
- Recommendation 9 – state that apart from issues over the availability of temporary accommodation units the Homelessness Prevention Service was handling well the demands made of it.
- Recommendation 11 – include actions taken, or being considered, as part of the Customer Service Review
- Recommendation 12 – to include the consideration being given to manage public perception of the issues of homelessness and to acknowledge that some individuals choose to be homeless - through choice.

4. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

5. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

PART II

6. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

Chair