

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Date: Monday 2 March 2015

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, A McGuinness, J Mead and P Stuart.

Also Present: J McManus HCC Director of Public Health

Start/End Time: Start Time: 18.00 hrs.
End Time: 19.30 hrs.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor E Connolly and the Youth Mayor Shae Field.

There were no declarations of interests.

Derek Lau, the Constitutional Services Apprentice, was introduced to the meeting.

2. MINUTES – 12 JANUARY 2015

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. UPDATE PUBLIC HEALTH

The Committee received an update on public health in Stevenage from Jim McManus, Hertfordshire County Council's Director of Public Health.

A copy of the public health statistics for Stevenage were circulated to the Committee and used as a basis for the discussion which centred on smoking cessation, life expectancy rates and ways of encouraging residents to adopt healthier lifestyle choices.

It was noted that people would often undertake a fitness regime for a specific reason, for instance to take part in a charity event such as a sponsored race or slim, rather than as a response to exhortations from 'the authorities' to change their lifestyles.

It was also observed that many people were put off by what they say as the promotion of 'over healthy' lifestyles and it was commented that some felt bullied by the patriarchal approach of some health agencies.

In reply to a question the Committee was advised of the plans for, and progress of the, 'Healthy Hub' in the Arts and Leisure Centre.

The Committee was advised that there was a network of 'Healthy Lifestyle Champions' in the county and it was confirmed that there were a number of youth champions in some secondary schools in the town. It was anticipated that a smoking cessation programme for young people would be launched in the near future and those champions would be instrumental in the programme. However it was noted that engagement with some schools remained unfulfilled.

Jim McManus advised the meeting that further funding could be made available and suggested that the way forward would be to convene a meeting of the interested parties, including members of the Committee, to find out which approaches with local people could work best regarding public health initiatives. The Scrutiny Officer undertook to arrange such a meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update be noted.

The Chair expressed her thanks to Jim McManus for his attendance at the meeting.

4. REVISED UPDATE ON HOMELESSNESS REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

The Scrutiny Officer represented a revised update of the Homelessness Review Recommendations which had been amended to include more detail on actions taken at the request of the Committee.

In reply to a question concerning the actions taken to assist people in managing their finances the Committee was advised that outcomes of the assistance given were monitored and that result were reviewed on a quarterly basis.

The Committee requested that a definition of the role of the Young Person Prevention Officer be added to recommendation 3, and more detail be provided to Members regarding the penalties for non-compliance of on-line applications.

It was **RESOLVED** that the revised update be noted.

5. REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND REPORT ON THE CONDITIONS OF THE LOCAL PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report and draft recommendations from the Community Select Committee's review into the private rented sector.

The Committee was advised that the finalised recommendations would be sent to the relevant Portfolio Holders and Officers who would then have two months in which to formally respond to the recommendations.

The Committee was further advised that if Private Landlords could be persuaded to work with the Council the Council's resilience to meeting its requirements to prevent

homelessness would be increased and could further reduce the risk of the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation in such cases.

In reply to a question concerning the vetting of potential landlords the Strategic Director (Community) undertook to share the Council's process with the Committee.

A Member questioned the consultation process that would be used should a Landlord Forum for Stevenage be established. In reply the Committee was advised that any such process would include known landlords, estate agents and letting agents.

Members requested that recommendation 6 be reworded to include details of the advice available to tenants to help them avoid becoming homeless.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. Having been considered by the Community Select Committee the recommendations below be presented to the Environment and Regeneration Portfolio Holder; the Housing Portfolio Holder and the Strategic Director (Community) and that a response be provided from these, and any other named officers and partners, within two months of the publishing of this report
2. Resident Involvement Groups undertake a fresh awareness campaign, promoting a generic logo and recognisable branding for the groups as well as promoting its purpose amongst local residents (of any tenure). This could be via a news article in the Chronicle, the Council's Residents magazine.
3. SBC endorse the work of the 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, the caveat that officers provide some more background information to the NLA before embarking on any formal promotion or training with that group.
4. Subject to the delivery of some satisfactory training sessions with the National Landlords' Association that officers investigate the possibility of a local Accreditation Scheme and report back to Members on the feasibility of this proposal at a future meeting of the Community Select Committee in 2015.
5. Housing Officers consider providing some awareness training to tenants on their expectations when renting a property, to educate them and avoid possible pitfalls.
6. Officers consider undertaking an awareness campaign regarding the extensive advice that Council Housing Officers are able to provide to Stevenage residents for both private and social rented sector irrespective of the residents tenure.
7. Members support the introduction of a Landlord Forum for Stevenage as detailed by the Strategic Housing Solutions Manager and would like to receive an update on the progress of this initiative at a future meeting of the Community Select Committee in 2015.

8. 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 its findings, which Members would like reported to a future meeting of the Community Select Committee in 2015.

6. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

7. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

PART II

8. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

Chair