

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Date: Monday 10 November 2014

Time: 18.00 hrs.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

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

Also Present: Councillors M Cherney-Craw and M Mckay

Start/End Time: Start Time: 18.00 hrs.
End Time: 20:10 hrs.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

There were no declarations of interests.

2. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE LOCAL PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

The meeting received a presentation on the Council's interaction with the private rented sector.

Jim Archibald, the Environmental Health Manager (Residential) informed the meeting of the team's tasks such as providing grants for disabled facilities and home improvement loans for minor works, inspection of empty properties and handling noise nuisance complaints. He also advised Members of powers for dealing with houses in a state of disrepair, lack of amenities in houses, overcrowding and houses in multiple occupation.

In response to a question, the Environmental Health Manager advised that having identified a hazard in a residential dwelling, Officers have within the Housing Act 2004, a number of measures which they could serve on the landlord to bring the property up to a better living condition and make the dwelling safe. The meeting was advised that Officers can issue improvement notices, prohibition orders, hazard awareness notices and emergency remedial action depending on the category of the hazard.

With regards to houses of multiple occupancy, the Officer advised that the team works proactively in conjunction with SBC Housing Advice, the Police and

Department of Works and Pension in identifying such properties.

The Environmental Health Manager advised Members that it is generally accepted that a significant improvement with the conditions of private rented sector could not be achieved by regulatory intervention alone but by working in conjunction with landlords on a voluntary basis. Members were informed that in general most landlords were in contact with SBC Housing Advice and kept their properties to an acceptable standard.

The meeting was informed that where Officers have had to intervene on behalf of the landlord to improve an amenity or to make the property safe the Council recovers costs only for the works undertaken.

Sue Waller, Strategic Housing Solutions Manager informed Members of the various tasks undertaken by her team which include providing housing advice to private rented sector tenants; responding to welfare reform and its impact on private rented sector; tackling unlawful evictions and landlord harassment, and encouraging best practice advice for landlord. She also highlighted the various activities of the private sector liaison team and the challenges with regards to future housing. Finally she advised that her team would be looking at a few initiatives such as setting up a landlord forum and developing a landlord incentive scheme within the private rented sector.

In response to a question, the Strategic Director (Community) advised Members that the Executive would be considering a report on the HRA Business Plan which addressed options with regards to housing supply in the town.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their presentation and invited Councillor M Cherney-Craw in her capacity as the Chair of the Housing Select Committee 2013/2014 for her views on the Scoping Document.

In considering the scoping document it was agreed that the following Councillors lead on the issues below

- Equalities and Diversity issues in the private rented sector – Councillor M Cherney-Craw
- National Landlord Association – Councillors S Mead and M Cherney-Craw
- Social Letting Agency – Councillor M Mckay
- Work with 50% of absent council leaseholders regarding commercial services for repairs – Councillor M Gardner

It was **RESOLVED** that the Scoping Document be agreed.

4. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

5. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

PART II

6. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

Chair