

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 7 September 2016

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Members: S Mead (Chair), M Notley (Vice-Chair),
D Bainbridge, E Connolly, E Harrington, A Mitchell
and G Snell.

In Attendance:

Start/End Time: Start Time: 6:00 pm
End Time: 7:40 pm

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Brown, J Mead and C Saunders.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – 28 JUNE 2016

It was **RESOLVED** that subject to including the name of Councillor Mitchell on the list of attendees, the Minutes of the meeting of the Community Select Committee held on 28 June 2016 are approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO DAMP AND MOULD IN STEVENAGE HOUSING STOCK

The Committee interviewed two tenants of Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) who had and were still, experiencing damp and mould in their properties.

Both witnesses shared their experiences, noting the issues that were raised with SBC Officers, the extent and scale of the issue and impact on their well-being. One witness reported that the damp and mould property had been ongoing for 5 years. Another witness reported that the damp and mould problem had contributed to the poor health of her baby.

The Committee were informed that the Council was in the process of developing a Damp and Condensation Strategy, which was to be considered later on the agenda, and invited Members to comment on it as it was currently in its draft stage.

The Head of Asset Management advised that the Strategy would be used as a measure to highlight the Council's performance especially on how it

addressed damp and mould issues within the Council's Housing Stock.

In response to Members' questions the Head of Asset Management stated that Environmental Health is not called as standard to assess persistent problems.

The Strategic Director (Community) also indicated that there were other measures in place to tackle incidents of damp and mould in SBC housing, including employing three surveyors and the development of a multimillion Flat Block refurbishment programme that would result in bespoke improvements to the 450 flat blocks. The amount of funding available would be confirmed as part of the HRA Business Plan refresh. It was noted that the new approach for damp and condensation would focus on treating the causes rather than just the symptoms.

The Chair suggested that a possible recommendation could be improving staff awareness and training on the issue in line with the draft Damp and Condensation Strategy. Also a further recommendation could be for officers to have a daily log of tenants' contact with officers, which may require a change in Housing IT systems.

The Committee asked what should be the expected response time to tenants' contact with the Council regarding damp and condensation issues?

The Strategic Director (Community) stated that the timing of the review and the recent allocation of this work to the Asset Management Team provided the Council with an opportunity to be very public with this issue and ask Tenants to come forward and highlight problems they have with Damp and Mould to establish more accurately how many cases there were.

In response to a question, Members were informed that a number of reasons could be attributed to the damp, mould and condensation in properties including the condition of the housing stock, the nature of how properties were now used in relation to what was anticipated when they were originally designed; and personal choices made by residents such as when / when not to use heating systems etc. Ground floor flats were highlighted as being potentially more at risk than other properties.

In regards to the monitoring of damp and mould in SBC properties, Members were advised that this was not within the remit of the Council's Environmental Health Team. The Strategic Director highlighted that Damp & Condensation was a key priority within the Excellent Council Homes for Life strand of the Future Town Future Council programme. As such Members would receive updates on performance in this area.

The Committee expressed its apologies to the two witnesses regarding their cases and advised that Housing Officers would continue to work with them until their issues were resolved.

4. URGENT PART I BUSINESS – DRAFT DAMP AND CONDENSATION POLICY

The Chair agreed to take this item as urgent business in order that scrutiny members could consider the draft strategy and include it in their review ahead of the Strategy being published by the Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People.

Members were invited to consider the Draft Damp and Condensation Strategy, and pass their comments to the Scrutiny Officer (who would raise their issues and comments with the Head of Asset Management) prior to the Strategy being published.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Draft Damp and Condensation Strategy is noted.

5. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

6. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR