

# Public Document Pack



## COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday, 26 July 2023

Time: 6.00pm,

Location: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Contact: Lisa Jerome (01438) 242203

committees@stevenage.gov.uk

Members: Councillors: S Mead (Chair), A Farquharson (Vice-Chair), J Ashley-Wren, F Chowdhury, J Duncan, M Humberstone, W Kerby, C McGrath, E Plater and C Veres

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## AGENDA

### PART 1

#### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

#### 2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 27 JUNE 2023

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the Community Select Committee held on Tuesday 27 June 2023.

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#### 3. HOUSING REPAIRS SERVICE - OFFICER PRESENTATION

To receive an officer presentation on the Housing Repairs service providing a perspective from the internal contractor team and from the Housing client side.

#### 4. HOUSING REPAIRS SCRUTINY SCOPING DOCUMENT

To receive a draft scoping document for a scrutiny review of the Council's Housing Repairs service.

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#### 5. URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

To consider any Part I business accepted by the Chair as urgent

**6. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

To consider the following motions:

1. That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the ground that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

**7. URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

To consider any Part II business accepted by the Chair as urgent

Agenda Published 18 July 2023

## STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

### COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

**Date: Tuesday, 27 June 2023**

**Time: 6.00pm**

**Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage**

**Present:** Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair), Alex Farquharson (Vice-Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren, Forhad Chowdhury, Mason Humberstone, Wendy Kerby, Conor McGrath, Ellie Plater and Carolina Veres.

**Start / End Time:** Start Time: 6.00pm  
End Time: 6.39pm

#### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Chair welcomed new Members to their first meeting of the Select Committee.

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor John Duncan.

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **2 TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Terms of Reference for the Community Select Committee, as approved at the Annual Council meeting held on 24 May 2023, were noted.

#### **3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS - 9 MARCH & 29 MARCH 2023**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meetings of the Community Select Committee held on 9 March 2023 and 29 March 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

#### **4 COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2023-24**

The Select Committee considered its proposed Work Programme for 2023/24.

The Chair introduced the report and stressed to Members that the work of the Committee had to be evidence-based, and that Members had a duty to research and probe the issues that they scrutinised in order that they were able to come to meetings informed, ready to elicit relevant information from witnesses and officers. In respect of the proposed Work Programme, she commented as follows:

**Repairs review** – some evidence gathering would be required by Members and officers to ascertain the state of the Council's Repairs service. This could also include benchmarking information with Repairs services operated by other local

authorities. The Scrutiny Officer invited Members to provide him with details of the type of casework enquiries they were receiving from residents regarding repairs. Another possibility would be Member site visits with the SBC Repairs Team. He commented that a new Assistant Director responsible for Housing Repairs was to take up post in early July 2023, and that he would invite her to attend the Select Committee's next meeting on 26 July 2023.

**Crime and Disorder** – the Select Committee had a statutory role to conduct one meeting a year to consider crime and disorder. This meeting was ably supported by the Council's Community Safety Team and the Police. Nearer the time of the meeting, Members would be requested to provide issues they wished to raise in advance, in order that the Police and officers were made aware of those issues so that the meeting could be focussed on those items.

**Public Health** – similarly, the Select Committee had previously agreed to have a standing item to conduct one meeting a year to consider public health. The County Director of Public Health (Prof. Jim McManus) was an excellent and knowledgeable speaker and it was always an interesting and informative meeting. As well as covering public health issues that were of local concern for Stevenage the intention was that Members would receive an update on the new Integrated Care Boards, which had replaced the former NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups.

**Cultural Strategy** – this would be an update review, carried out via a one-off meeting, currently programmed for 19 September 2023. This would build on the excellent work that the Committee had undertaken to pre-scrutinise a New Towns Heritage Centre at the new Civic Hub building.

**Pre-scrutiny items** – these would now be led by Scrutiny Members, rather than the previous regime of Portfolio Holder Advisory Groups (PHAGs) led by the relevant Executive Member. For 2023/24, pre-scrutiny items would include Community Centres, Housing Allocations Policy, Housing Management Governance arrangements and the Fairlands Valley Park Activity Centre. The Chair asked if consideration of the latter item could be carried out as soon as possible, and the Scrutiny Officer agreed to ascertain a timescale from the Operations Director.

The Chair advised that the Work Programme was very much a working document. If any Members wished to ask questions about the Work Programme outside of the meeting, she invited them to contact her or the Scrutiny Officer either by phone or e-mail.

In response to a Member's question about damp and mould complaints raised by Council tenants/leaseholders to councillors, the Chair outlined the process for the logging such complaints. She commented that there was more than one cause of damp/mould in Council premises, and each case had to be investigated before any remedial action was authorised. Every case of damp and mould had to be considered as a separate case as each may have a different cause. However, the Council's response to initial reports was now much faster, although the solution may take some time due to various factors, including the tenant posing obstacles to progress.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Select Committee's Work Programme for 2023/24, as set out in the agenda, be noted.

**5 EXECUTIVE MEMBER RESPONSE TO THE HOUSING VOIDS REVIEW & FINAL REPORT**

The Select Committee considered the Executive Member's response to the Housing Voids Review final report.

The Housing Operations Manager (Providing Homes) commented that the recommendations in the final report had been supported by the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development and would be implemented by officers going forward. The proposed tenancy audits would be a positive addition to the ongoing work aimed at improving the turnaround times for bringing void properties back into use.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Housing Development's response to the Select Committee's recommendations set out in its final report on the Voids Review be noted.

**6 URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

**7 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

**8 URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

**CHAIR**

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# DRAFT

## Template Scoping Document

<b>Community Select Committee</b>	
<b>Scrutiny Review Title:</b>	<b>Repairs Review</b>
<b>Background issues</b> to review – rationale for scrutinising this issue:	When Members considered their work programme for the 2023-24 Municipal Year at its meeting on 9 March 2023 it was agreed to include a review item on the Repairs process, and this was endorsed on 27 June 2023 CSC meeting.
Is this issue covered by Corporate Plans?	Yes, it is one of the Council's Key Performance Indicators in its Corporate Performance suite.
<b>Focus of the review:</b> (State what the review focus will be)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Look at the current repairs standards</u> – consider the policy on 'emergency', 'urgent' and 'routine' repair works, and the scope of works currently undertaken, (e.g. fencing and other renewals) which Housing consultant Ridge are currently reviewing for the Council.</li><li>• <u>Contractor focus</u> - Provide a presentation from the SBC housing contractor focusing on some key stats including the breakdown on the volumes of works e.g. emergency, urgent etc, % of first time fix, staffing overview, some examples of what's working well and where the challenges are.</li><li>• <u>Client focus</u> - Provide insight from the Council's housing consultant with an overview from the 'client' in terms of the work of Ridge, how the refreshed asset strategy will hopefully increase the proactive / planned maintenance programmes and also look at the need to review the Stevenage Standard i.e. the fencing policy.</li><li>• <u>Look at the current process officers use regarding receiving, logging and carry out repairs to see if it is fit for purpose</u> as Members are "concerned that the current processes do not appear to be straightforward or be running well"</li><li>• <u>Identify ways to improve the current service including, where possible, streamlining the process to have one point of contact for tenants from the point they register a repair request</u> this would help to co-ordinate all repairs in the property, especially important in cases where there are multiple repairs needed in the same property.</li><li>• <u>Improve Communications</u> (The context is to avoid cases where "the current process</li></ul>

	<p>requires too many steps with too many operatives and subcontractors to get a repair resolved”) Members are concerned that “Tenants are being told a repair will happen, then it doesn't and there doesn't appear to be any process for letting the tenant know what is going on and why,” “Communication about repairs is poor or non-existent leading to anger and frustration for tenants”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Early identification of cases that could be described as in the “too difficult box”</u> – (The context is a Member quoted a case where “there has been a flooding issue that has been going on for multiple years, and it appears that no one can get to the root cause of the problem, so it falls into the ‘too difficult box’”</li> <li>• <u>Make better use of technology</u> – (For instance, tenants can send a photo of the problem, such as a blown down fence, that perhaps doesn't need an officer to inspect before materials are ordered and repair booked etc. if the photo shows the extent of the repair)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Timing issues:</b> Are there any timing constraints to when the review can be carried out?</p>	<p>None that the Scrutiny Officer is aware of, other than there are 4 formal Committee meetings in the calendar of meetings earmarked for this work. Other work may need to be carried out informally and reported back to the Committee.</p>
<p>The Committee will meet on (provide <b>dates</b> if known):</p>	<p>Dates: Day/Month/Time/Venue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 26 July 2023 – CSC consider a draft scoping document and receive an officer presentation from Dean Stevens, SBC Housing Maintenance Manager on the current Repairs service.</li> <li>• Thurs 19 Oct 2023 - Scope signed off by Committee and interview witnesses for evidence gathering</li> <li>• Tue 14 Nov continue to interview witnesses for evidence gathering</li> <li>• Mon 8 Jan 2024 - Early recommendations and outline draft report to Select Committee</li> <li>• Wed 31 Jan 2024 - Final recommendations &amp; report</li> </ul>
<p><b>SBC Leads</b> (list the Executive Portfolio Holders and SD's Heads of Service who should appear as witnesses):</p>	<p><i>Officers have suggested the following people:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Executive Portfolio Holder(s) for Housing and Housing Investment</i></li> <li>• <i>New Assistant Director Building Safety, Denise Lewis</i></li> <li>• <i>Operations Director, Housing Investment &amp; Communities &amp; Neighbourhoods, Rob</i></li> </ul>



	<p><i>Gregory</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Assistant Director, Stevenage Direct Services, Steve Dupoy</i></li> <li>• <i>Housing Maintenance Manager, Dean Stevens</i></li> <li>• <i>Housing Repairs Manager/Officers</i></li> </ul>
Any <b>other witnesses</b> (external persons/critical friend)?:	To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting. <i>Possible options identified by officers:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>To be advised by the Assistant Director, Building Safety if it is possible meet with tenants/prospective tenants to discuss their views</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Allocation of lead Members</b> on specific individual issues/questions:</p> <p>Any other Questions Members wish to cover:</p>	<p>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting.</p> <p>Members will undertake their own desktop and fact-finding research and ask questions on the following areas (list the issues to address during the interviews):</p> <p><i>To be identified</i></p>
<b>Site visits and evidence gathering in the Community</b>	To be advised if this is possible to arrange for a repairs home visit? This may be less straight forward to arrange as it was for the Voids review, so it may be considered in this instance to not be appropriate as the properties will not be vacant.
<p><b>Equalities and Diversity issues:</b> The review will consider what the relevant equalities and diversity issues are regarding the Scrutiny subject that is being scrutinised</p>	<p>It was agreed that the review would address equalities and diversity issues directly in the review.</p> <p><u>Equalities &amp; Diversity Issues</u> – Are there any E&amp;D issues to consider in this review? –</p> <p>The review should consider what equality and diversity issues Housing Repairs should encompass such as, fair access to bids for those in digital poverty?</p>
<b>Constraints</b> (Issues that have been highlighted at the scoping stage but are too broad/detailed to be covered by the review):	<i>To be identified by the Committee at the scoping meeting on 11 October 2022 (These issues can be captured and dealt with via other means – Briefings/email/officer action etc)</i>
<b>Background Documents/data</b> that can be provided to the review	<p><i>As identified by the Committee at the draft scoping meeting July and October 2023:</i></p> <p>Evidence requested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>

**Agreed Milestones and review sign**

**off** - To be agreed by Members and officers

*Formal response from Executive Portfolio Holder (Executives have a Statutory requirement to respond to Scrutiny review recommendations two months after receiving a final report and recommendations of a review: **Date Executive Portfolio responses are expected** (dependent on the final report & executive portfolio response template publishing date): **DD MM YY***

***Date for monitoring implementation of recommendations – final sign off (typically one year from completion of the review): **DD MM YY**** (Close to this date the Select Committee will receive a report at a Committee meeting to agree the final sign off of the review recommendations)*