

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday, 3 April 2024

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

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

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 6.56pm

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

There were no apologies for absence.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Community Select Committee held on Thursday 29 February 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER RESPONSE TO THE CSC REPAIRS SCRUTINY REVIEW**

The Chair introduced the Executive Member response to the Review of Housing Repairs.

The Committee acknowledged that all recommendations had been agreed. The Chair thanked the Assistant Director (Building Safety and Housing Property Services) and requested that, rather than wait for a review, they provide an update as and when they find appropriate.

The Assistant Director (Building Safety and Housing Property Services) thanked the Committee for their recommendations.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Executive Member response to the Review of Housing Repairs is noted.

4 **CRIME & DISORDER DISCUSSION ITEM**

The Chair introduced the Head of Community Advice and Support Sarah Pateman, the Chief Executive Matthew Partridge, and the Portfolio Holder for Community

Safety and Equalities Cllr Jackie Hollywell.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Equalities introduced a presentation provided by Hertfordshire Constabulary. She acknowledged the ongoing efforts to address various issues within the community, particularly focused on the reduction of antisocial behaviour. She highlighted the challenges faced due to limited resources but emphasised the commitment to making effective use of available resources.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Equalities reminded the Committee of the frequent Police Priorities Meetings that helped focus efforts on particular issues within the district and encouraged Councillors to engage in local street meets and work collaboratively with the Police and Council Communities and Neighbourhood Team.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Equalities praised the recently launched 'Build a Better Bedwell' together with the Safer Street funding that aims to regenerate the area, reduce crime, and tackle anti-social behaviour. She advised that the project had already shown some benefits and that similar projects would be welcomed should there be the necessary funding and resources available.

Head of Community Advice and Support then talked the Committee through the presentation and advised the Committee that there had been a 28% reduction in theft from person incidents across Stevenage, with 70 incidents compared to 97 in the previous year. The Town Centre remained a hotspot for such incidents, although the situation had improved. This was in part due to plain clothes police operations and regular crime prevention events within the Town Centre.

The Head of Community Advice and Support highlighted efforts to address youth involvement in crime, including intervention briefings and collaboration with the Youth Justice Team. Initiatives like "Youth No More" aimed to prevent antisocial behaviour and crime among young people by working with schools and families.

There had been a 50% reduction in incidents initially classified as drugs-related antisocial behaviour, with 241 incidents compared to 478 in the previous year. Hot spot mapping showed very few incidents in Stevenage parks except for the Town Centre Gardens and King George V Playing Fields. The mapping identified areas with higher incidents, leading to targeted patrols and problem-solving plans.

The Head of Community Advice and Support advised the Committee that fly-tipping was often logged by the Police as a crime but not as an indicator of a full investigation as they were often dealt with by the Councils Community Safety Officers and Wardens, with a focus on finding cost-effective solutions. Strategies included encouraging perpetrators to remove waste themselves.

Members praised the work of Officers.

The Chair asked a question related to the reference on the second slide to sending letters with the intent to cause distress or anxiety. The Head of Community Advice and Support confirmed advised that such letters referred to scams or fraudulent

correspondence designed to intimidate or defraud recipients.

A Member asked a question related to crime trends in the Roaring Meg Retail Park area. The Head of Community Advice and Support responded that crime numbers in the Roaring Meg area had not increased and highlighted overall reductions in crime and antisocial behaviour across the board.

A Member expressed concern about antisocial behaviour in the Marymead area and raised issues related to drug problems and malfunctioning CCTV cameras. The Head of Community Advice and Support assured that the concerns would be addressed. She mentioned ongoing efforts to tackle youth nuisance issues and promised to follow up on the status of CCTV cameras. The Chair advised caution in labelling all youth presence as antisocial behaviour. She emphasised the importance of understanding the context and impact before categorising incidents and advised Councillors to work with the Neighbourhood Warden team to develop a presence in such areas.

Some Members asked questions related to resources. The Head of Community Advice and Support acknowledged the ongoing need for more resources but indicated that, to her knowledge, police staffing levels had not been significantly impacted recently. She stated that she hadn't been made aware of any major PCSO vacancies in Stevenage and indicated that the police would inform her if there were staffing issues. She emphasised the importance of continual assessment of resource needs. The Chief Executive added that the Council had had several helpful discussions with the police over the years regarding resourcing and highlighted the opportunity for a conversation to take place with the new Police and Crime Commissioner in due course regarding resource allocation should this be deemed to be necessary. The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Equalities highlighted the unique challenges faced by Stevenage due to factors including the presence of a major hospital, railway station and large police station and custody suite.

A Member asked a question related to work undertaken with schools and raised concerns regarding children who were not attending school. The Head of Community Advice and Support provided an overview of the various topics covered in school sessions, including knife crime and gang violence courses that were funded through the Police Crime Commissioner. The Council had worked closely with schools, and police, regarding graffiti which led to two arrests. Other initiatives included working with the No More Service to talk to students about drugs and alcohol, and relationships. They also provided training for teachers related to spotting the signs of domestic abuse and had given out food parcels. She added that efforts are made to reach out to children who were not in education, through various programs, which work to get them back into education.

The Chair directed a question to the Chief Executive, inquiring about a positive and a negative aspect of the current situation compared to five years ago. The Chief Executive acknowledged the positive trend in crime figures over the past five years, attributing it to the focused priorities within the Community Safety Strategy which had been implemented in partnership with the police and other SoSafe Partnership stakeholders. He highlighted challenges related to maintaining internal resourcing

within the Council but also mentioned successes in securing significant external funding for initiatives like SADA.

The Chair expressed appreciation for the Head of Community Advice and Support, the Chief Executive, and the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Equalities for keeping everyone informed about town issues, and working closely with stakeholders, actively seeking resolutions, which contributed to a sense of safety within the community.

5 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

None.

6 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds 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 the reasons for the following reports being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

7 SURVIVORS AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (SADA) PRESENTATION

The Committee viewed a Part II presentation from Survivors against Domestic Abuse (SADA).

Members asked a number of questions, which were responded to by officers.

8 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR