

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday, 3 July 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Ellie Plater (Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren (Vice-Chair), Kamal Choudhury, Mason Humberstone, Sarah Mead, Carolina Veres and Peter Wilkins

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.00pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Leanne Brady and Lynda Guy.

2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

It was **RESOLVED** that the Terms of Reference for the Community Select Committee, as approved at the Annual Council Meeting held on 22 May 2025, be noted.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Community Select Committee meeting held on 26 March and 8 April 2025 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2025-26

The Chair introduced the Community Select Work Programme for 2025-26 and welcomed the Scrutiny Officer to provide an overview.

It was noted that items on the work programme were open to discussion, and members were invited to raise any questions as each item was reviewed.

Progress of the new Housing Allocations Policy

Members reviewed the progress on the new Housing Allocations Policy which was scheduled to return to the Committee in October 2025.

Members requested that the update included an emphasis on equalities, specifically addressing the needs of residents with mental or physical health conditions. It was noted that the policy was comprehensive and expressed the need for clearer

guidance such as a checklist to support both residents and members in navigating the application process.

Officers confirmed that additional work had been undertaken to strengthen the policy's approach to equalities and to better support care leavers. These developments were to be included in the October 2025 update.

Tenant Enforcement/Tenancy Audits

An update was provided on Tenant Enforcement, and it was confirmed that an update on Tenancy Audits was scheduled for the next meeting in September 2025. No further questions were raised.

One-off update item on Housing Damp & Mould

The Committee noted the need for an update on the Council's Damp and Mould policy, due to upcoming legislation coming into effect in October 2025. Officers advised that an update would be brought to the Committee in September 2025. Members were informed that partial government guidance had been received, and work had commenced to update relevant practices and policies.

It was acknowledged that the government had imposed a tight turnaround, and members expressed concern over the limited timeframe available to implement the changes. The Committee noted that further updates and scrutiny would likely be required beyond the September meeting. It was noted that Damp and Mould remained a longstanding challenge for local authorities, particularly in relation to older housing stock.

Officers confirmed that the Council's Damp and Mould policy had been updated and was currently compliant with existing requirements. The new legislation would also include additional hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). A briefing note would be circulated to members ahead of the September meeting to provide further details.

Members welcomed the Council's ongoing commitment to addressing this evolving issue and emphasised the importance of continued monitoring and review.

It was further noted that the Committee would be provided with tangible information on the impact of the recent integration of the Repairs and Voids services, including the benefits and outcomes of combining these facilities. This request was noted and would be addressed in the September update.

Equalities and Diversity

The Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee that work had commenced on Equalities and Diversity. A draft report was scheduled to be presented to the Committee in November 2025.

Older People

The Committee considered the Council's work in supporting older residents. While it was noted that Hertfordshire County Council were responsible for Older People's Services, Stevenage Borough Council had undertaken several important initiatives. These included the development of an Age-Friendly Community, and the organisation of a conference planned for Autumn 2025.

Members raised concerns regarding digital exclusion, with residents unable to access essential services delivered online. The Committee highlighted that while digital exclusion was a key issue, the broader and varied needs of older residents should also be considered in future planning and service delivery.

Members asked for some information on the Age-Friendly Agenda ahead of the upcoming conference. Officers confirmed that this information would be shared with members in advance of the event.

The Chair suggested inviting the relevant Portfolio Holders and SBC's representative from the Hertfordshire County Council Health Scrutiny Board Committee to a future meeting to provide information, participating in relation to access to GP services.

Community Centre's

At this juncture, Officers advised that work was underway to explore potential funding allocations to support community centres across the town.

Members emphasised the importance of community centres in promoting the wellbeing and enrichment of residents.

The Committee highlighted the need for an update on this matter and requested that a formal agenda item be included at a future meeting to provide a clear statement on the current position and the future direction for the town's community centres.

Statutory Item – Crime and Disorder Committee

The Committee noted its statutory responsibility to meet once a year as the Council's designated Crime and Disorder Committee. Officers confirmed that the next meeting would be scheduled to align with the release of annual performance data from the Police.

It was noted that the previous meeting included contributions from partners including the Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) team, and that this engagement would continue in future meetings.

Members highlighted the safety and wellbeing of teenagers in the town, and the need to address youth related issues such as online safety and anti-social behaviour. It was agreed that these topics would be incorporated into the agenda for the next Crime and Disorder Committee Meeting.

The Chair noted the importance of involving Portfolio Holders in Committee

discussions wherever possible to ensure accountability and active engagement, while maintaining the Committee's independence and scrutiny focus.

A question was raised regarding the importance of addressing males suffering domestic violence and the Committee requested relevant reports and data on this issue in the next Crime and Disorder meeting.

Public Health

The Committee received an update on revisiting Public Health as a work programme item. It was noted that the Committee had previously enjoyed a close working focus with the former Hertfordshire County Council Director of Public Health, and via this scrutiny focus the Council had previously received external funding for local projects. Members expressed a strong desire to retain Public Health on the Committee's work programme due to its ongoing relevance to the wellbeing of Stevenage residents.

Members highlighted the importance of access to relevant data to ensure transparency and accountability and welcomed local public health education initiatives such as the Healthy Hub.

It was acknowledged that Public Health linked with other areas of the Committee's work including with older people and digital exclusion.

Officers confirmed that a meeting with the Director of Public Health's office would be scheduled in the coming weeks to progress the matter.

2026 – 27 Work Programme

Officers informed the Committee that preparations were underway for the development of the Community Select Committee's 2026 – 27 work programme. It was noted that items would remain on the agenda due to outstanding actions from previous years. There were no current items for pre-scrutiny or policy development to report.

5 COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE ACTION TRACKER 2025

The Committee reviewed the action tracker to monitor the progress of past recommendations which included responses from the Portfolio Holders.

Members received updates on a number of review areas. It was confirmed that work on Equality and Diversity had commenced, and Members would be informed when the review was complete. Updates were also provided on Housing Repairs and Voids, and Members were invited to consider scheduling future updates on this area.

The Committee noted that the New Towns Heritage Centre Review remained in development alongside wider regeneration plans. The Housing Allocations review was confirmed to be returning to the Committee in October 2025. Damp and Mould was discussed during the meeting and a follow up was scheduled.

Members commented on the importance of maintaining a focus on Sports and Leisure services. It was noted that the contract should be monitored to ensure it was meeting the needs of the community. The Committee discussed the difficulties with booking systems, limited space in the new facilities and the need for a clear vision due to recent changes in the Portfolio Holders. Members commented on the membership tiers offered by Everyone Active and emphasised that these services should be accessible to all residents.

Further discussions took place regarding the role of Portfolio Holders in the Community Select Committee meetings. It was agreed that Portfolio Holders would be invited selectively, where appropriate, to help ensure clarity and accountability while maintaining the integrity and independence of the scrutiny process.

6 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

7 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was **RESOLVED**:

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 grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 to 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.

2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

8 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR