

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Thursday 13 July 2017

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: D Bainbridge, E Connolly, M Notley (Vice-Chair in the Chair), L Harrington, J Mead, A Mitchell CC and G Snell.

Councillor Jeanette Thomas was 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 Jim Brown, Sarah Mead (Chair) and Chris Saunders.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – 20 JUNE 2017

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Community Select Committee held on 20 June 2017 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. FIRE SAFETY – PRESENTATION

The Committee received a presentation regarding fire safety in high rise buildings. The Head of Asset Management, Neil Wilson-Prior, provided the Committee with the presentation which outlined the measures that the Council had taken since the Grenfell Fire tragedy. The review addressed the fire safety measures in high rise residential tower blocks (over 18 metres high) including construction design and materials, fire doors, smoke detectors and dry-riser water appliances.

The Head of Asset Management reported that there would be a feasibility study carried out into sprinkler systems looking at the various systems available and their merits, suitability and potential costs. The feasibility study would report back on its findings when it is completed.

The presentation also addressed the Stay Put policy for tower blocks. In blocks that have not been clad with ACM materials it was still considered the safest advice to residents.

Staying compliant with the local Fire Safety Officer's advice was vital to

keeping residents in our high rise buildings safe, this includes maintaining a regular inspection regime, keeping communal areas clear, maintaining the integrity of the building, including keeping any repair holes filled.

Weekly Fire Safety meetings will continue to take place for the foreseeable future. Officers were voluntarily sending samples of the materials used in a portion of high rise window frames to the Building Research Establishment (BRE) for testing as well as the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and will act on any findings. These panels were not the same as those which the DCLG were now testing on a national basis. However whilst officers were aware of the panels technical specifications for absolute assurance they had submitted them for testing.

Home visits had been carried out to all high rise residential towers where the Council was the Landlord. These visits had helped to assure residents of the safety of the blocks and were a good opportunity to pass on fire safety messages to all residents.

In response to a Member's question, the Head of Asset Management confirmed that officers would be setting up a safety group for tenants / leaseholders.

The Head of Asset Management also responded to questions on fire safety in Houses of Multiple Occupancy, and converted office blocks to residential dwellings.

It was **RESOLVED** that the presentation is noted.

4. APPLICATION OF THE HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

The Committee received a presentation from the Housing & Homeless Manager and the Assistant Director Housing & Investment on aspects of Housing Allocations that could be potential areas for the scrutiny review. In preparation for the meeting Officers had met with the Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People who was also in attendance at the meeting.

The presentation outlined the following issues for possible scrutiny:

- Sheltered Criteria
- Under-occupiers
- Local Connection
- Local Residency – Private Rented Sector

Sheltered Criteria

Officers provided Members with information on the statistical performance of voids for Sheltered Accommodation since the new Housing Allocations policy of excluding homeowners from the register was implemented in January 2015. The issue that Members could scrutinise would be looking

at using the hard to let sheltered accommodation and using this to alleviate pressure on SBC stock as temporary or emergency housing for homeless households.

Under Occupiers

Officers stated that currently under-occupiers are effectively unable to bid under the current scheme, and they would recommend considering a priority banding for under occupiers to incentivise them to bid for smaller properties more suited to their needs. There were currently 155 Band F applicants seeking to downsize who could benefit from a change to the banding as well as a further 70 applicants in other bands who are also wishing to downsize. There are 270 SBC tenants in overcrowded conditions.

Local Connection & Local Residency Rules

Another area that needs looking at is the local connection rule. Currently the criteria state that applicants require a residency qualification of 5 years. There are situations where applicants take up a Private Rented Sector let just outside of the Borough as there is no suitable accommodation in the Borough but they are then penalised by being taken off the register even if they are outside of the area for just a few months.

Reconnection Worker

Officers provided the Committee with an update on the work of the Reconnection Worker since the post holder has been employed by the Council. In the six months since the post was established it has helped 103 households that would have been potentially homeless due to parental evictions.

Following the presentation Members agreed on the issues that the review should focus on and in addition the Committee received a submission from the Chair outlining the issues that she wished the Committee to consider as part of the review.

It was **RESOLVED** that

(1) The Housing Allocations presentation is noted; and
(2) The scope of the review as outlined in the scoping document is agreed with the following amendments:

(i) The review should focus on Sheltered Criteria & Under-Occupiers.

(ii) The objective of the scrutiny:

That the committee be satisfied that the allocations policy is being implemented effectively and serving the people on the waiting list according to the expectations of the council.

Aims:

- To establish whether the allocations policy is effective in housing residents according to the premise that members of each band/group are being given the opportunity of housing
- Whether the letting process is dealing accordingly with housing needs – evidence should be presented to the committee to show where the process is effective and where it is not. Should data need protecting this should be done leaving the case study details for analysis
- Whether the housing offered is fit for habitation/meets the needs of the resident (including sheltered housing)
- Identify any problems with allocations in order to inform changes needed to the policy

Evidence requested:

- Analysis of housing allocations for 2016 – 17 groups/bands/property/ waiting times
- Stage 1 to 3 complaints relating to allocations & lettings

Witnesses:

- A lettings officer
- Jaine Cresser
- Jeanette Thomas
- Ideally, recently housed tenants

(iii) The Scrutiny Officer agreed to redraft and circulate the scoping document to reflect the above amendments.

5. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None

6. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required

7. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR