

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 30 November 2021

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair), Margaret Notley (Vice-Chair) (Vice Chair), Matt Creasey, John Duncan, Alex Farquharson, Liz Harrington and Claire Parris.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 06:00 pm
End Time: 07:38 pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephen Booth, Myla Arceno and Simon Speller.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 3 NOVEMBER 2021

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of Community Select Committee meeting held on Wednesday 3 November 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDENS PRESENTATION

The Committee received a presentation from the Neighbourhood Wardens Team regarding their work through the pandemic. The presentation covered a range of areas and issues including Covid marshalling, food hub, vaccination centres, litter picking and hedge pruning, stewarding and anti-social behaviour. The Neighbourhood Wardens Team provided the following key updates regarding their work during the pandemic:

- The Team helped people at the food hub who were shielding or vulnerable with the delivery of their grocery shopping and other essentials. Helping up to 20 deliveries a day including weekend and bank holidays.
- The Team distributed free 850 hand sanitisers and 15,000 masks in shopping areas, churches, schools and other organisations and charities. The project was funded through Councillors' Local Community Budget.
- The Team helped at the Robertson House Vaccination Centre by directing the public at the car park to the appropriate sites for their vaccine appointments.
- During the winter phase of the pandemic 2021, the Team provided support to the Stevenage Helps phone line by directing people to charities, food banks, provided information on vaccines and organised appointments for the Citizen

Advice Bureau. The process also attracted about 20 volunteers which could be used for future community projects.

- The Team's dedicated foot patrols covered parks and open spaces, town centre and play areas to advise members of the public on how to stay safe and Covid compliant.
- After the lockdown restrictions were lifted, the Team provided support in regards to stewarding the open cinema in the Town Centre to assure members of the public on Covid safety.
- The Team supported the Dene Lane Path Clearance project in Bandle Hill, working with young offenders on litter picking and hedge pruning as part of the offenders Community Payback Scheme.
- Roebuck Wood litter picking was carried out in partnership with the year 6 students of Roebuck Junior School, and they collected 32 bags of rubbish.
- The Team installed new shrub beds and repaired old ones in Peartree and Shephall, and carried out neighbourhood garden improvement works in Martins Wood, and also helped with the grass cutting in Siddons Road Square.
- The Team organised and carried out a litter pick project in Meadway Park in partnership with Woolenwick Junior School.
- The Team planted 9 new trees in Hampson Park Orchard with the financial support from the Councillor's Local Community Budget.
- An Older People's Day was organised and provided a good opportunity for networking.
- The Team helped with tackling anti-social behaviour in partnership with other officers of the Council and the Police. The Neighbourhood Wardens worked closely with officers from Environmental Health, Planning and Enforcement, Parking Services and Community Safety.
- The Neighbourhood Wardens dealt with the fly tipping, littering, Commercial Waste, Household waste issues, dog fouling and abandoned cars and illegal parking often by polite conflict resolution tactics.
- The Team built working relationships with the stakeholders in the community, and worked in partnership with Haven First, which helped residents with their CV and interview techniques to get them back to work.
- The Team had reported over 400 environmental issues to relevant departments, and worked closely with the elected Members of the Council.

A Member commented that they hold the service in very high regard, and are delighted to see that the service is no longer dependent on New Homes Bonus funding. The service is deemed integral to SBC ambitions to connect officers, members and our neighbourhood communities together.

In response to a series question from Members, the Team provided the following answers:

- Some of the fixed term Neighbourhood Wardens were currently contracted till March 2022.
- The Neighbourhood Wardens work in partnership with the Police on matters of fly tipping and inconsiderate parking.
- The service operates 7 days a week with flexible shifts for staff.

- The Team expected to expand the scope of their projects in the future.

The Chair thanked the Neighbourhood Wardens for their hard work during the pandemic and their presentation and advised that some time ago Members had requested this session with the Neighbourhood Wardens and at the time there had been some staff turnover but the service was settled now and Members were keen to support the long term funding and move towards more fixed term contracts of the Wardens.

The Chair was concerned that the Wardens were receiving requests for their services from a wide range of agencies including internal and external partners so this need to be monitored to make sure that it was manageable.

4 **DAMP AND MOULD UPDATE & PRESENTATION**

The Investment Programme Manager provided a report in relation to damp, condensation and mould in Council properties. He advised Members that the Council was continuing to deal with the damp and mould cases during the Covid 19 pandemic. The tools that the Council had previously used for dealing with the damp and mould had been, in his opinion, too simplistic. He explained that better and improved ventilations were needed, and fans alone were not enough and that there was a need to have specialist contractors in place to carry out required works.

He advised Members that the Council had entered into a 12 month framework agreement with Quality Eradication Services Today (QEST) to deal with the damp and mould in the Council properties, and was in discussion with the QEST to carry out further works when needed as result of their work on damp and mould. Also Mouldex, a specialist ventilation and mould treatment company was brought on board, which helped reduce the cost of fans by approximately 45%. In addition QEST were now looking at providing decorating following works with 15 colour choices, and can also supply thermal wall paper with a thermal plaster material to help mitigate against future issues.

The number of enquiries received had been reduced. In November 2020 a total of 59 enquiries were received compared to November 2021 where only 28 enquires occurred. The current strategy was proving effective.

The Investment Programme Manager informed Members that his Team had developed skills and confidence to identify issues causing damp and mould in the Council's housing stocks. They also developed strong interdepartmental relationship with other teams which had helped with the access issues, supporting tenants with mental health and other vulnerabilities that had helped to resolve cases across departments.

In response to a series of questions and suggestions from Members, the Investment Programme Manager advised the Committee on the following key issues:

- The backlog had been cleared and cases were coming through but these were fewer than would be expected at this time of the year.

- He was currently working on the new electronic feedback form, which only had three questions for customers to answer.
- Any complicated case would be reviewed again after six months.
- Both QEST and Mouldex provided a weekly report for their work.
- A leaflet would also be dropped in the surrounding neighbourhoods when work is done in a particular area.

Members agreed that the leaflet should contain clear contact information for the department and also be included in the tenancy agreement. The Investment Manager would circulate the final version to Members before publication. Members agreed with the Chair, that they were keen to see red indicators shown in the report be addressed.

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That the Committee supported the current approach which was in line with the Housing Ombudsman Service Report.
- That the Committee continued to support the Team to deliver on its promise to tackle damp and mould issues by ensuring that sufficient funding was available.
- That the Committee would provide feedback on the draft Mould Leaflet for the final version.

5 **EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NEW TOWNS HERITAGE CENTRE**

The Committee received a report on possible recommendations for the New Towns Heritage Centre. Member agreed on the following recommendations:

- Linked to the recommendation for 'museum's without walls', contact should be made with other new towns for a joint proposal to City Design Group regarding the development of digital maps relating to a number of local authority areas to secure a better deal.
- Stevenage had a large number of Twentieth Century architecture in the Town Centre, so it should be recommended that there be an approach to the Twentieth Century Society for funding.
- The Council should approach English Heritage as part of Stevenage's Cultural Heritage linking the Fairlands Valley Farmhouse to its pre-new town's history and heritage.

The Strategic Director advised Members that the Council could explore external funding streams to help further develop its museum website presence.

It was **RESOLVED** that, with the additions and amendments made at the meeting the Committee supported the emerging recommendations.

6 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

7 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

8 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR