

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 9 March 2023

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair), Alex Farquharson (Vice-Chair), Stephen Booth, Adrian Brown, Jim Brown, Nazmin Chowdhury, John Duncan, Wendy Kerby and Anne Wells.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.28pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies received.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - MONDAY 9 JANUARY 2023

It was **RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 9 January 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

3 DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2023-24

The Chair presented the draft Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2023-24 to the Committee. Each scrutiny Member was encouraged to choose a maximum of three suggested items as part of an annual scrutiny survey. The items listed in the report were made up of Members suggestions. The Committee was advised that ideally there was one main scrutiny review item and then shorter updates/one off performance meetings. The Members discussed and debated the following potential scrutiny items currently on the Work Programme for 2023/24:

- Local Community Centres/Local Committees/Resident Meetings – An update on the work on community centres was considered something that would be useful, and this was potentially a substantial piece of policy development work. Another Member highlighted the importance of local committees. The Operations Director advised part of the challenge regarding Community Centres was looking at the existing estate and all the buildings and see housing development opportunities would be possible. There were new schemes, such as the Oval, which bring a lot of opportunities. He also advised that the item was worthy of two separate Portfolio Holder Advisory Group (PHAG) sessions as, although they were related, there was a lot of

work to be done.

- Repairs – The Committee needed a better understanding of this to look at the problems to help residents. A Member suggested there were problems with repairs and the organisation needed to respond quicker to tenants reporting problems. Another Member agreed stating that the majority of resident frustration comes from communication problems. A Member proposed that the Committee should look at the customer journey through repairs, as repairs as a whole subject was too broad.
- Cultural strategy – This was significant to the town and it was useful to see where the redevelopment of Stevenage was at. A Member suggested it would also be helpful to see where the town stood post-covid and what challenges the town faced. The Scrutiny Officer advised this item should be one update and one presentation at most.
- Public Health Scrutiny – The Scrutiny Officer advised this was good practice to look at once a year, and the Committee needed to prioritise this as this year's session didn't take place.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that there were some items that were legal requirements, such as Crime and Disorder, so they weren't included on the list of items.

The Committee decided that some suggested items were better suited for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This included SBCs use of consultants, the analysis of the census process and results, and the customer experience. The Operations Director suggested that the census item could also be done in an all-Member briefing as this was relevant to everyone and all policy areas and decisions. The Chair proposed that the suggested item of a cross party team on change and improvement would be better implemented by an executive Member and could be forwarded to the Leader.

It was **RESOLVED**: That the Committee noted the draft Work Programme for 2023-24 and agreed that the work programme should include:

- A review of repairs (main review item)
- An update on the Cultural Strategy (one off performance review)
- A policy development item on Community Centres (Portfolio Holder Advisory Group)
- A Public Health meeting
- Statutory Crime and Disorder Committee meeting

4 **DRAFT REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF HOUSING VOIDS**

The Chair introduced the draft report and recommendations of the scrutiny review of housing voids. She summarised that this review was to look at why the voids

process took so long.

In response to Member comments/questions, Officers advised:

- There was room for improvement and the Council was reviewing processes but reminded Members to be mindful of the resources available.
- The 26-day target was a historic target. This didn't just include void repairs but the entire letting process. There was national benchmarking data available, but national standards can't always compare to local levels. It was advised data and comparisons were being identified from neighbouring districts.
- The tenant's responsibility was contained in the letting agreement, but it would be useful to remind them periodically through communication and inspections. Proactive inspections were important to prevent issues such as unreported damage or repairs and unauthorised modifications.

Members agreed on the following recommendations, with the additional conditions/changes:

- 4.2.1 "Carry out a programmed cycle of inspections on properties. See paragraph 3.1.3. Consideration would need to be given to how such an inspection regime would be instigated and whether there could be agreed triggers that would necessitate a visit, such as complaints from neighbours due to the dumping of rubbish, non-payment of rent, as well as any planned maintenance or reactive maintenance visits to the property etc. and on any such visits a checklist in relation to a disrepair/defects survey should be completed."
- 4.6.1 "That Officers provide Members with a detailed proposal of the end-to-end void process..."
- 4.7.1 "The Committee is keen for Officers to explore ways to hold tenants to account for keeping SBC's property/their home in good repair. Where there are rechargeable repairs identified in inspection activity or otherwise, throughout the term of the tenancy that the tenant is charged, at discretion, to avoid leaving multiple repairs and a large bill at the end of the tenancy. This should include unauthorised modifications."

The removal of recommendation 8 – Undertake a review of the lettable standard.

It was **RESOLVED**: That the Committee noted the draft report and supported the recommendations of the scrutiny review of housing voids, with the above amendments.

5 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

There was none.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was none.

CHAIR