

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday, 26 July 2023

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

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor John Duncan.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 27 JUNE 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Community Select Committee held on 27 June 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 HOUSING REPAIRS SERVICE - OFFICER PRESENTATION

The Assistant Director, Stevenage Direct Services and Dean Stevens, Maintenance and Repairs manager gave a presentation to the Committee including overview of the internal contractor arrangements for the delivery of day to day council property repairs.

The Committee was advised that:

- the team delivered day to day repairs, alongside void repairs and caretaking services;
- approximately 8,500 tenanted properties were looked after;
- day to day repairs were delivered by the Council's in-house team supported by a range of specialist contractors eg glazing and fencing;
- during 2022/23 over 2,000 urgent repairs and 14,000 routine repairs are carried out;
- 95% of repairs were fixed first time.

In response to a question, officers advised that for an out of hours emergency repair, tenants were advised that they should call the regular repairs number which would

be automatically transferred to a member of the Out of Hours Team who would process the repair.

A Member also asked how a repair was categorised and gave the example of a front door not working, reducing the exit of the property to just the rear door. Officers advised that if a tenant was able to safely exit from a property, this would not be deemed as an emergency but would be categorised as an urgent or routine repair.

Officers then gave an overview of the resources within the team and advised that work was allocated and overseen by three trade supervisors and three schedulers, supported by two Maintenance Surveyors.

Members were advised that the budget for day to day repairs and out of hours emergency calls was approximately £2.5million per annum.

In relation to the performance standards for repairs the following categories were noted:

- Emergency (immediate risk or danger to the tenant or property) – 24 hours;
- Urgent (if not remedied may cause substantial discomfort or damage) – 5 days;
- Routine (minor inconvenience and little impact on the property) – 20 days.

Members were pleased to note that customer satisfaction had risen from 77% to 88% over the past 6 weeks against a target of 90%. The target for first time fix was 95% and Officers were pleased to report that 98% was currently being achieved.

Members were advised of a number of previous challenges to the Service including recruitment problems resulting in an over reliance on agency workers, limited capability of digital systems, 'lost' jobs not being fully completed on the day and insufficient capacity within the service.

Officers reported on recent improvements and current actions:

- The appointment of an Assistant Director for Building Safety and Housing Property Services;
- Supervisors had been freed up to focus solely on repairs optimisation with a focus on completing all jobs scheduled each day;
- New digital ways of working leading to tenants being able to book their own repairs;
- Less reliance on agency workers with the team almost entirely staffed by contracted workers;
- Improved stock availability since the start of the new materials contract with Gibbs and Dandy which had contributed to the first-time fix ethos.

Members were advised that in relation to contact with tenants on the day of the scheduled repair, text messages and sometimes a call to ensure the tenant was in the property would be made so that there were no wasted visits.

Members were pleased to note the streamlining improvements to the way the

Housing IT (Northgate) system was accessed, which would ensure the Repairs Team were fully linked to other areas within the Housing Service

The Committee was advised that although huge improvements had been made to the service, there were still a number of current challenges including:

- Recruitment into various roles could still be challenging due to a buoyant construction sector;
- Enhanced planned and cyclical maintenance works to assets would reduce the demands on the repairs service; and
- Single trades operatives were not as efficient as multi trade operatives.

In response to a question, officers advised that in relation to historical complex legacy cases these were being worked through by officers and should become a thing of the past with most cases now being resolved quickly and repaired on the same day.

The Chair thanked the officers for their excellent presentation and the good news reported about the improvements to the service. The Chair was keen that should also be shared with all Members of the Council along with council tenants.

4 **HOUSING REPAIRS SCRUTINY SCOPING DOCUMENT**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a draft scoping document for the review of the Repairs Service.

Members were keen to include a visit with the Team and site visits if this could be arranged. The Repairs manager advised that he would be happy to arrange this and would liaise with the Scrutiny officer for dates and a schedule for the visits.

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR