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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 13 June 2024

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren (Vice-Chair)
Leanne Brady, Kamal Choudhury, Alistair Gordon, Lynda Guy, Mason
Humberstone and Jade Woods

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 7.05pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no apologies received and no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 3 APRIL 2024**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meetings of the Community Select Committee held on 3 April 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

3 **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Terms of Reference for the Community Select Committee, as approved at the Annual Council meeting held on 22nd May, were noted. It was noted that unfortunately the wrong Terms of Reference had been attached to the agenda, the Scrutiny Officer agreed to circulate the correct version to the Committee members.

4 **HOUSING ALLOCATIONS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

The Committee received the Presentation from the Officer and Members had raised questions:

- The Chair queried how confident officers were if residents were being evicted from their home and could potentially be made homeless how easy would it be to find information regarding where to get help on the SBC website. The Head of Community Advice and Support, Sarah Pateman explained that the website was currently being updated to add all relevant information that residents may need, such as links to the department that would assist with these types of housing enquiries. The Officer stated the department were

aiming for the work to be completed by the end of July.

- It was noted that tenant and resident engagement were two separate things.
- The Committee queried whether when the new system goes live, would residents have problems logging into their profile or would all the information be transferred over and whether they had all been informed? The Officer explained that all information will transfer over. Residents were informed via letters that they were able to update their details via a QR code in the letter or via a paper response.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the Housing Allocations Communications Plan.

5 **RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

The Committee received a presentation from the Assistant Director, Housing & Neighbourhoods, Kerry Clifford and Members raised a number of questions:

It was stated by Members that the policy needed to be clear about what the council can do and what to expect, as in some cases residents expect that the council can do more than it can.

- Members queried how SBC would demonstrate that they were complying with the new Housing Regulation Act 2023 standards with no extra funding? The Assistant Director Housing & Neighbourhoods explained that it would be difficult for the Council to do this but officers would be focusing on demonstrating reasonable adjustments and show that the decision making process is fair and transparent.
- It was questioned by Members how far the Council were from the strategy proposed today. It was stated that there is further work to do which is why the strategy is being brought forward.
- Members queried how expectations would be managed. The Assistant Director Housing & Neighbourhoods, explained that the most effective way to manage expectations regarding housing was to make service standards, procedures and policies as accessible as possible and easy to understand. It was stated one of the most important objectives is to train staff to deal with and verbalise the decision making process, therefore those officers who have the most contact with residents, such as the repairs team or the Customer Service Centre, would need to fully understand the new legislative standards as well as service standards.
- Members stated that notice boards could be used to communicate with residents and a new customer scrutiny panel could be created. Recruitment

of people to a customer scrutiny panel with specific skills would be needed. If a panel was created the suggestion was that the chair changes for each meeting of the panel or to recruit a strong chair to keep the panel on topic and it would be important to stop the loudest voices dominating the discussions. Members suggested that a customer scrutiny panel could be recruited to conduct task and finish style meetings with 2 or 3 reviews a year. The Assistant Director Housing & Neighbourhoods stated that officers would look to build a link between the Members Community Select Committee and any resident customer scrutiny panel.

- The Chair asked if the Council could build on its co-operative neighbourhoods approach by using neighbourhood wardens to reach out to those residents who don't use online methods of communication. The Assistant Director Housing & Neighbourhoods agreed that this would happen with various models of regular face to face as well as online engagement.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the Resident Engagement Strategy.

6 **WORK PROGRAMME 2024-25**

The Select Committee considered its proposed Work Programme for 2024/25 and noted the following items:

- The Chair stated that with regards to the Equality and Diversity work programme item this will now be handled as two separate topics, one focusing on equalities and diversity in the workforce and the other on what's happening in the community, and they would be engaging with the new Cabinet Portfolio Holder, Cllr Conor McGrath.
- A one-off update on neighbourhood wardens.
- A one-off update on the performance of the new leisure contract.
- A statutory crime and disorder committee which is an annual item.
- A one-off focus on public health
- A series of pre-scrutiny policy development items throughout the year

It was **RESOLVED** that the Select Committee's Work Programme for 2024/25, as set out in the agenda, be noted.

7 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

There were none.

8 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That under Section 100A 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 involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
- That the reasons for the following reports being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

9 PART II MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 3 APRIL 2024

It was **RESOLVED** the Part II Minutes of Previous Meeting held on the 3rd April 2024 were noted.

10 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

There were none.

CHAIR