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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 8 April 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

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

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 6.56pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Committee Members, Councillor Stephen Booth, Akin Elekolusi and Mason Humberstone.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME - 2025-26**

The Chair invited the Scrutiny Officer to provide detail on the 2024/25 work programme and the emerging work programme options for 2025-26.

One key area of focus for the Committee was the Equalities and Diversity Review. The next steps involved presenting a draft report to the Committee, providing members with the opportunity to give feedback ahead of the final version. Both versions of the report were scheduled to be brought forward in the next municipal year.

The Committee had received updates on the one-off reviews of the Housing Allocations Policy, Housing Investment – Asset Management, and Damp and Mould, with further discussions noted for the future. A one-off scrutiny review of the Neighbourhood Wardens was also undertaken, during which officers outlined their roles and recent work across the town. Additionally, the Committee reviewed the new Leisure Contract and the Crime and Disorder item.

The Committee reviewed the suggested items for the Work Programme 2025-26:

(1) Progress Report on Housing Allocations

The Scrutiny Officer provided an overview of the new Housing Allocations Policy, and members discussed the ongoing challenges in managing expectations related to the housing waiting list. It was noted that the Committee would revisit the policy in

Autumn 2025, one year after its implementation, ahead of a scheduled update to Cabinet.

(2) Damp and Mould

The Chair advised that it would be beneficial to develop a written process to support both Members and Tenants in understanding the Council's approach to managing Damp and Mould cases. It was noted that the use of flowcharts to illustrate these processes would be a useful tool for improving understanding and accountability.

The Committee discussed the ongoing challenges posed by Damp and Mould and the importance of tracking repeat cases. Officers explained that emergency removal was carried out as an immediate response, followed by necessary remedial works, including improvements to ventilation and heating systems. While relevant information was available, the need for face-to-face engagement by surveyors and repairs teams was emphasised as key to reinforcing important messages.

Members were informed that a new Head of Repairs had been appointed who would lead on Damp and Mold issues, with the expectation of improved performance and greater consistency. It was also noted that Awaab's Law would come into legislation in October 2025.

Officers proposed that the Damp and Mould programme be brought back to Committee in the autumn, with Members invited to submit specific questions in advance to ensure key concerns were fully addressed.

(3) Tenant Enforcement and Audits

Officers explained that the programme item would cover trends identified in enforcement actions taken against tenants. Audits were highlighted as a valuable tool for improving the Council's understanding of its housing stock and occupancy levels.

The Committee discussed the need for continued improvement in data accuracy and consistency and Officers confirmed that steps were being taken to refine the audit policy and ensure outcomes were clearly communicated.

It was noted that the Tenancy Audit procedure had been reviewed, it had identified that a formal policy for staff with a clear accessible Tenancy Audit Policy and associated guide for tenants was needed.

(4) Public Health

It was also noted that Public Health remained a priority and the Chair suggested inviting a representative from the Hertfordshire Health Scrutiny to speak to the Committee about health and wellbeing statistics specific to Stevenage.

In addition, officers confirmed they would invite the Director of Public Health at Hertfordshire County Council to attend a future meeting to further explore this topic. The importance of promoting health and wellbeing awareness across Stevenage

was emphasised, and the Chair highlighted that increasing awareness could support residents in making more informed decisions about their health.

(5) Older People

The Chair outlined the challenges faced by older people in relation to digital exclusion. It was noted that there would be a focus on improving community transport, alongside greater consideration for individuals who are partially sighted or have sensory needs. It was suggested that the original Cultural Strategy could be revisited, with a renewed emphasis on diversity and inclusivity.

(6) Scrutiny of ASB

Officers explained that the new policy had been approved, but the Committee had the option to revisit the policy in one years' time for a review.

(7) Community Centres

The Assistant Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods would liaise with the Section 151 Officer regarding the status of the policy and would provide feedback to members.

Members also requested an update on the future of Community Centres, specifically regarding the Play Centre and Pavilion at St Nicholas Park.

(8) Pre-Scrutiny of HRA Business Plan

The Assistant Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods explained that a formalised HRA Business Plan was required by July 2025 and confirmed it would be brought to the Committee if feasible.

(9) Resident Engagement

The Assistant Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods confirmed that an update on the Resident Engagement Strategy would be provided.

(10) Community Cohesion

The Assistant Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods advised that a briefing note would be circulated to Members, outlining the Council's Resettlement Strategy.

At this juncture, it was noted that this item could be referred to a future meeting of the Modern Member Programme (MMP) for further discussion.

A question was raised regarding the role of the police in addressing social media issues affecting community cohesion. The Assistant Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods confirmed that this matter would be raised at the upcoming multi-agency resettlement meeting.

The Chair invited Members to provide any further items for future work plan

programme. Members expressed concern over the number of flats being developed and their suitability for older and disabled residents. Specific concerns were raised about the adequacy of evacuation plans for vulnerable residents, and it was noted that the Council's policy on this matter would be reviewed.

Members also raised concerns of accessibility at the Stevenage Train Station, particularly with the lift, and it was noted that this issue was being addressed by the Environment and Economy Committee.

3 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part I Business

4 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Not required.

5 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR