

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 16 September 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Ellie Plater (Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren (Vice-Chair),
Kamal Choudhury, Sarah Mead, Carolina Veres and Peter Wilkins

Start / End Start Time: 6:00pm
Time: End Time: 7:45pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Leanne Brady, Akin Elekolusi, Lynda Guy and Mason Humberstone.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - THURSDAY 3 JULY 2025

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Community Select Committee meeting held on 3 July 2025 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 UPDATE ITEM ON SBC SOCIAL HOUSING DAMP AND MOULD

The Assistant Director of Building Safety and Housing Property Services delivered a presentation and update on damp and mould in social housing.

Members received information on the causes of damp and mould. This included moisture sources, building and environmental conditions and occupant behaviour. Members were also informed on the mitigating factors such as controlling moisture, improved ventilation, managing temperature and insulation, using appropriate materials and finishes and adopting good occupant practices.

The Committee was presented with the service performance data for damp and mould inspections completed between April and July 2025. It was reported that 97% of all cases raised had been completed, with 89% of these completed within the internal target of 10 working days. Officers noted that four inspections remained outstanding, three of which were overdue due to access issues.

It was highlighted that the number of inspections increased in July 2025, coinciding with the release of information regarding Awaab's Law. Members were also shown a comparison with performance trends from the previous year, as well as data on repeat cases and the tracking of live cases.

Members were presented with a comparison of the performance trends of the previous year.

Repeat cases and the current tracking of live cases was noted.

The new legislation for Damp and Mould was presented to the Committee as a process flow chart and it was noted that Awaab's Law would be introduced to the Social Housing Act 2023 from 27 October 2025. The timeframes for when work would need to complete by was noted.

The Committee was informed of the composition of the damp and mould team, and it was noted that one surveyor post remained vacant. Reviews of the damp and mould policy, housing asset management processes, and the no access policy (in conjunction with the compliance team) were reported.

The Assistant Director advised that the average cost per case was £1,150. Monthly monitoring would continue as officers anticipated knock-on impacts from the forthcoming legislation.

In response to a question regarding emergency repairs, officers confirmed that the definition was contained within the Repairs and Maintenance Policy, available on the Stevenage Borough Council website. Members suggested that clearer photographic examples of emergency cases would be useful and officers noted that such cases were assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Questions were raised regarding communication between the Council and tenants, and Members stressed the importance of contractor accountability where works were incomplete. Officers explained that under the new contract, contractors would be measured against KPIs, which will be monitored and reported monthly as part of contract management arrangements.

In response to questions, officers confirmed that tenants received a written report with advice following inspections, which tenants signed to acknowledge receipt and understanding. It was also confirmed that surveyors' qualifications formed part of the recruitment process to ensure staff competence.

Officers clarified that, should the budget be exceeded, additional resources would need to be identified to support residents. Quotes for works were secured from the relevant appointed contractor(s) by the Damp and Mould team, with competitive rates applied as a result of a recent procurement process, and post-inspections carried out.

In response to a question from the Chair regarding the effectiveness of Awaab's Law, officers noted that it would enable clearer mapping of required actions and timeframes, as well as providing evidence of compliance.

The Chair also queried why budgets had been higher in previous years. Officers explained that overall expenditure should reduce over time as preventative measures addressed the root causes of damp and mould.

The Chair asked whether the retrofitting of properties had reduced cases of damp and mould. Officers advised that it was too early to determine the impact and that further work was needed to improve data collection on the housing stock. A clearer numerical understanding of reported cases would enable more targeted and effective action to address the issue.

The chair thanked officers for their contributions to the meeting.

4 **TENANT ENFORCEMENT & TENANCY AUDITS**

The Head of Housing Operations introduced the item and explained the reasons for undertaking tenancy audits. This included supporting tenant well-being, detecting fraud and facilitating collaborative working.

An explanation of the Social Regulation Act 2023 and consumer standards was provided. It was noted that the Act had granted stronger powers to inspect and enforce standards to tenants.

The Committee were shown the step-by-step process of how a tenancy audit was carried out. Housing Officers issued an appointment letter to the tenant advising of the date and time of the audit and then contacting the tenant again to confirm availability. The visit was then undertaken, during which any necessary repairs would be identified and raised.

Officers explained the outcomes of tenancy audits, noting that these allowed follow up actions when required. Referrals to other teams were also made where necessary.

It was reported that a target of 160 tenancy audits per month had been set. Between January and August 2025, 15% of audits were unable to be completed due to access not being granted. Members were also advised of the enforcement process that followed where access was not given after multiple attempts.

Members were informed of trends identified through tenancy audits, such as unauthorised works undertaken by tenants and household details not being kept up to date.

Members were shown photographs of unauthorised works undertaken by a tenant, with a significant volume of waste presented at the property. Officers arranged for an engineer to visit and provide advice, and the tenants were decanted from the property. The cost of the works was recharged to the tenant. Further photographs were shown from a separate tenancy audit where no concerns were identified, and it was confirmed that a subsequent audit would be scheduled in three years' time.

At this juncture, it was noted that access rates had declined in December 2024 due to school holidays and limited tenant availability. The no access process was applied to support entry where required.

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation and thanked the former Chair of

Community Select for the work previously undertaken, which had enabled the current arrangements to be established.

A question was raised as to whether the audits were focused on one area or undertaken across the town. Officers explained that audits were informed by data indicating where residents had not booked a repair for some time or had limited contact. This approach was applied to all Right to Buy properties.

Members commented on safeguarding issues which the Housing Officers may encounter during Tenancy Audits. Officers advised that Housing Officers had received the appropriate training to report any concerns, enabling the Council to support both tenants and officers.

Members also commented on the standard of properties once they had been taken over from voids, and officers noted that a review of the lettable standards was currently underway. Tenants would also receive a survey to identify any concerns.

A question was raised regarding drug use within council properties, and officers confirmed this was a breach of tenancy agreements. and noted that significant evidence was needed to progress further. They explained that significant evidence was required to take further action, and letters could be issued to flat blocks to advise residents that the Council was aware of the issue.

Officers confirmed that a new Resident Engagement Manager had been appointed and that new communications to educate tenants would be introduced. It was noted that further messaging would be promoted through the Council's social media channels.

It was noted that the Tenancy Audits would also provide insight into instances of overcrowding and under-occupancy within properties.

In response to a question on the no access policy, officers advised that this would now take into account stock conditions, compliance and non-access for repairs to make sure the relevant teams are notified.

It was noted that consideration was being given to the introduction of an automated text messaging system to provide residents with notification of the timeframes for Housing Officer visits.

Officers noted that the work of the ASB team could be reported to committee regarding how cases were triaged and addressed.

The Chair thanked officers for their contributions to the meeting.

5 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That, under Section 100(A) 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 involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 to 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.
2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR