

**Minutes of a Meeting of the External
Partnerships Select Committee held at
Council Chamber, Surrey Heath House
on 24 June 2014**

+ Cllr Josephine Hawkins (Chairman)
+ Cllr Paul Deach (Vice Chairman)

- Cllr Glyn Carpenter	+ Cllr Chris Pitt
+ Cllr Ian Cullen	- Cllr Ian Sams
+ Cllr Tim Dodds	- Cllr Pat Tedder
- Cllr Liane Gibson	+ Cllr Alan Whittart
+ Cllr David Hamilton	- Cllr John Winterton
- Cllr Lexie Kemp	Cllr Beverley Harding
+ Cllr Adrian Page	Cllr Judi Trow
+ Cllr Ken Pedder	

+ Present
- Apologies for absence presented

Substitutes: Cllr Beverley Harding and Cllr Judi Trow

In Attendance:

1 Apologies for Absence

2 Chairman's Announcements and Welcome to Guests

The Chairman welcomed Inspector Martin Goodwin from the Surrey Heath Neighbourhood Police Team and Rob Mills, the Regional Housing Director Accent South.

3 Minutes

The open minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 4 March 2014 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

4 Declarations of Interest

5 Crime and Disorder Update

The Committee received an update on community safety/crime and disorder in the Borough, based on data compiled by the Force Analysis Unit, but with more of a link to how the Neighbourhood Team would be operating in the future.

Inspector Martin Goodwin reported that he had spent the previous 7 months reviewing neighbourhood policing for the whole of the Surrey Police Force. He reiterated the Neighbourhood Team's priorities, those being to keep people safe, being there when people needed them and relentless pursuit of criminality. Current objectives included reducing public place violent crime and reduce dwelling burglary.

The Force faced a number of challenges which were reflected in Neighbourhood Teams, including a reduction in Police Community Support Officers, though this had been mitigated by increases in the number of constables. Inspector Goodwin reported that he had an excellent team, with leadership which tackled blockages, there were further resources which were task-able and co-location had proved to be a notable success.

Any potential tasking would be considered against the Team's priorities and agencies would need to share risk and intelligence. Some areas which would be priorities for partners, such as fly tipping, would not rank high in force priorities, but, as in all partnership arrangements the lead organisation will drive issues forward supported by other partners and his team would support partners where possible.

In response to Members questions, Inspector Goodwin highlighted the following:

- (i) Partner Support – There was a need for certain partners to engage more in issues. There was a need for Surrey Police, Accent and Sentinel to have robust arrangements in place. Whilst support for CIAG and JAG was good, there were times when the Police would look for lower tolerance levels when dealing with difficult tenants;
- (ii) Gypsies and Travellers – The Team had good links with the Council in respect of the 2 official traveller sites. The difficulty in the Borough was illegal sites. The Police and Borough Council worked closely, dealing with anti-social behaviour and moving travellers on from illegal sites. There were challenges from close proximity to other areas where travellers were also being moved on;
- (iii) Drugs – The key target in the Borough was Class A drugs. Whilst the Force looked to give users the opportunity to break dependencies and come off drugs, such as crystal meths, the main driver was tackling the sale and usage of drugs and taking away the proceeds of crime;
- (iv) Neighbourhood Watch Meetings – Inspector Goodwin acknowledged that there had not been a police presence at the recent meeting of Neighbourhood Watch groups from across the Borough. This was regrettable, but was the result of a communications error and in no way reflected the support that the Neighbourhood Team had previously provided and would continue to do in the future;
- (v) Police Surgeries – The experience of Police surgeries had been that the same people attended with the same single issue representations and the numbers attending were extremely limited and not necessarily the target audience. As such, the resources allocated were disproportionate to the outcomes; and
- (vi) Fly tipping in Chobham – Whilst it was recognised that there was a significant issue with fly-tipping in Chobham and the Police had assisted in a recent enforcement exercise, the lead Authority was the Borough Council and fly-tipping was not a top priority for the neighbourhood Team.

RESOLVED, that the presentation be noted and that the Neighbourhood Inspector be invited to make further presentations to future meetings.

6 Accent Housing Group

Rob Mills, the Regional Housing Director, Accent South gave a presentation on the Accent Group, its governance, the work of the Group in Surrey Heath and local initiatives/joint working with the Council.

The Accent Group's structures were functional rather than geographical, with 3 Directorates and a single Accent Board and Executive, leading to quick and clear decision making.

A Regional Customer Services Committee focussed on service delivery, value for money, improvements to property management/maintenance and influencing local decision making. Councillor Colin Dougan was an active member of this committee.

In terms of the Group achievements in 2013/14, Rob Mills reported that Accent had launched a national repairs contact centre and five local contact centres. New staff structures had been introduced, including "patch based" officers and dedicated home ownership officers.

A number of residents had been recruited to local customer services committees and measures were in place to assist residents through welfare reforms. In 2013, overall resident satisfaction had been recorded at 79%, with 77% satisfaction with home quality, 78% on repairs, 61% on listening to views and 72% on keeping residents informed.

In terms of its customers, Rob Mills reported that Accent was committed to provide a named local housing officer and contact centre, extra help and tailored tenancy support and improved services. Greater consistency, better use of IT, staff training and a simplified approach to service provision would lead to higher quality services.

The Group Business Plan for 2014 and onwards to 2020, aimed to improve performance, efficiency and resident satisfaction, improve sustainability, growing modestly with an incremental approach to development and re-investment and securing more funding.

Accent Group was working jointly with partner agencies in Surrey Heath on a Joint Housing Register / Allocations policy, temporary accommodation and down-sizing projects including the establishment of a 'Home Swap' shop.

The Group had jointly funded a Money Advisor with the Borough Council and CAB and had worked with a number of partners in St Michaels Ward on projects including Community First funding for employment support and the development of a multi-use games area (MUGA).

Accent had been heavily involved in the Old Dean Community Group and was working closely with the Family Support Team.

The Group had 3,165 properties in the Borough, all of which were tenures. In 2013/14, there were 392 lettings, with 77 families in temporary accommodation and 46 in sheltered housing. Of the evictions during that period, 6 had been of single people, 4 were couples and 4 were families.

Accent had engaged on 2 down-sizing projects, seeking to free up larger properties and trigger more movement through temporary accommodation. Accent had actively worked with Job Centres Plus to provide interview assessment facilities at Station House, to assist residents' employment prospects. However, the Group reported a number of challenges, including the impact of welfare reforms, the lack of new affordable housing and the number of vacant garages, many of which were in poor repair. Up to 30 houses could be built on garage sites that could not be let.

There had been 77 complaints in 2013/14, 40 of which had related to repairs and maintenance and 6 complaints had continued to Stage 2 of the Group's complaints procedures. There had been 36 empty properties at year end, of which 3 had been unavailable due to major works and targets had been missed on rent loss, turnover, repairs and re-let times. Members noted that the majority of complaints that they received related response times for maintenance.

The vast majority of Accent properties in the South were in this Borough, but the Group had previously purchased properties in Thanet. It would now be looking to sell those properties and use the capital receipts to develop more properties in its core area.

Residents' concerns over poor communication could be eased by a new initiative to engage with people through Facebook and Twitter.

Mr Mills noted concerns about elderly residents in Chobham having fears of being moved out of the area in any downsizing process, but stated that Accent gave tenancies for life and no resident would be forced to move. The development at Windsor Court, which had previously been bed-sit accommodation couldn't be let and had been demolished to create 8 three-bedroom houses.

In response to Members' questions on links with the Police and concerns on the lack of action taken to tackle anti-social tenants, Mr Mills explained the complex processes required for dealing with anti-social residents, areas where Accent worked well with the Police and others where he felt that Accent could have a greater input. He recognised the critical role of all partners in managing risk.

RESOLVED, that the presentation be noted and that the Accent Group be invited to provide an update to a future meeting.

7

Annual Review of the Work Programmes for 2013/14 for External Partnerships Select Committee

The Chairman explained to Members that this and the two scrutiny committees would submit a report to the Executive each year, reviewing the topics considered during the previous municipal year, indicating lessons learnt.

Annex A to the Committee report sought to analyse and evaluate what had been achieved in 2013/14 and note some of the key issues and outcomes that had resulted.

RESOLVED, that the Table at Annex A to the Committee report be submitted to the Executive with the reviews of the Community Services and Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committees.

8 Committee Work Programme

The Committee considered a report on the work programme for the remainder of the 2013/14 municipal year.

The Environment Agency and Surrey Search and Rescue had been invited to the next meeting and Members agreed to invite Thames Water and Affinity Water companies to attend the Committee's November 2014 meeting.

Whilst recognising synergies between the taxi marshals and the community safety theme of the January 2015 meeting, it was considered that the four presentations currently scheduled would suffice for that meeting. It was agreed that Taxi Marshals should be included as an item for a future meeting.

RESOLVED, that the Work Programme for 2014/15, as attached at Annex A to these minutes, be agreed.

Mayor