

Minutes of a Meeting of the External Partnerships Select Committee held at Council Chamber, Surrey Heath House, Knoll Road, Camberley, GU15 3HD on 12 February 2019

+ Cllr Rebecca Jennings-Evans (Chairman)

- Max Nelson (Vice Chairman)

Cllr Bill Chapman	+ Cllr Robin Perry
+ Cllr Ian Cullen	+ Cllr Chris Pitt
+ Cllr Ruth Hutchinson	+ Cllr Nic Price
+ Cllr David Lewis	Cllr Wynne Price
+ Cllr Oliver Lewis	- Cllr Joanne Potter
+ Cllr Jonathan Lytle	+ Cllr Darryl Ratiram
	- Cllr Ian Sams

+ Present

- Apologies for absence presented

Substitutes: Cllr Valerie White (In place of Cllr Sams)

Members in Attendance: Cllr Rodney Bates and Cllr Pat Tedder

15/EP Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2018 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

16/EP Accent Housing

Rob Mills, Director of Customer Experience (South), gave a presentation updating Members in respect of Accent Housing provision in Surrey Heath.

Accent had provided homes and services since 1966 and had a national portfolio of 20,000 properties. Accent provided homes as well as tailored services to help throughout residents' journeys.

During the 2018/2019 financial year, Accent had provided homes for 287 households last year across the South Region including 24 independent living (sheltered) units in Surrey Heath. Accent provided homes to those on the Council's Joint Housing register and worked with those in particular who were homeless, needed to move for medical reasons or were living in overcrowded or poor accommodation.

Accent had built positive relationships with the Council's Housing Needs and Housing Benefits teams, as well as the Citizens Advice Bureau and several charities. Accent worked with the bodies to identify those in need of Discretionary Housing Payment, improve movement in the existing Housing stock and create local letting plans on new developments. In addition Accent had been working with

public sector and charitable bodies to soften the negative effects of recent benefit reform which had burdened many tenants with debt.

Accent had continuously invested in its housing stock and spent a total of £1.7 million upgrading its existing properties within the last year. Moreover, as an ongoing project, the association had acquired and developed a number of garage sites to produce extra affordable dwellings. Accent had also been working proactively to work on joint ventures with local authorities to seize new site opportunities such as on Sullivan Road just off the A30.

Accent was working to restructure and develop its services to customers. This included the renting ready programme; which was provided in conjunction with Crisis, the Hope Hub and the Council. The programme offered additional support to those with little experience of independent living. In addition the new service offer included new communication options and the creation of new 'Customer Partner', roles. It was envisaged that the new customer partners had the ability to act as an individual point of communication for customers; as well as acting as a caseworker for tenancies and keeping an overview of the management of standards, safety and anti-social behaviour issues.

Arising from the Committee's questions and comments the following points were noted:

- Tenant affordable housing units could sometimes be typified by limited floor space, overdevelopment of sites and a lack of amenity space. Whilst this could be attributed to some Accent schemes such as Bagshot Green, all Accent's housing units met the nationally described space standards. In addition as development sites in Surrey Heath were expensive to acquire, there was a balance to be struck between sizeable units and the economic viability of schemes.
- There had been problems in respect of the reporting of maintenance issues in Accent properties and the associated repair process. Whilst it was maintained that a large proportion of the problems stemmed from Accent South's previous maintenance contractor- the MD group-, it was recognised that call-answer times of an average of 2.5 minutes by the group's maintenance call centre in Shipley were unacceptable. Members were recommended to encourage constituents to report maintenance problems via Accent's online residents' portal in order to allow efficient reporting and the ability to easily track the stages of the repair. Despite this there was praise that the call centre was open 7 days a week for the reporting of maintenance issues.
- There was recognition that greater communication sometimes needed to be conducted with incoming accent tenants in respect to the condition of the relevant property. During a tenant turnaround carpets had been variably ripped out; sometimes leaving new tenants with bare floors and the need seek funding for carpets from charitable bodies.
- There was sometimes a need to make a judgement on the economic cost to benefit ratio, when considering renovations. It was underlined that constant income from rent was crucial to sustain Accent's service model. Where properties, such as at Ballard Court, were

- failing to attract tenants, there was a necessity to upgrade the decoration and flooring in order to attract tenants and collect rent.
- Accent were willing to support the Council's commitment to house up to ten Syrian Refugee families by 2020 and had already homed 2 refugee families within their properties in Surrey Heath. In addition the organisation was working with the Council's Housing Services Manager to engage with private landlords to partially fulfill the commitment through the private sector.
 - Accent's tenancy sustainability service was best placed to help tenants who had encountered debt problems following national welfare reform and it was recognised that better publicity of the availability of the service was key.
 - Funds would be devolved downwards to allow the new named 'Customer Partners' to make decisions on individual tenants' circumstances. It was envisaged the new Customer Partner service would curtail the "one stop away" perspective, which Accent's services had grown. In addition there would be a total of 9 Customer Partners per 450-500 properties.
 - Whilst there were arguments for people deemed as particularly vulnerable not to be given tenancies in the rural areas of the borough and as neighbours to others considered deemed particularly vulnerable, it was underlined that tenants apply for housing at their own prerogative via the joint housing register.
 - Accent were working closely with the police and Council in order to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour problems at Accent sites. Previously injunctions, mediation and repossession have been used proportionally in conjunction with the police.

The Committee thanked Mr Mills for his informative update.

17/EP Citizens Advice: Surrey Heath

The Chief Executive Officer, Kate Sawby, gave a presentation in respect of the work of Citizens Advice Surrey Heath.

Citizen's Advice Surrey Heath aimed to tailor their services to the challenges facing Surrey Heath residents; whilst meeting the needs and signposting 4,000 clients, about more than 13,000 issues, last year alone. In addition the organisation had seen significant increases in email and webchat correspondence in the last year.

Whilst Citizen's advice continued to help people with issues around welfare benefit, consumer rights, housing, employment and relationships, the average issues per client had increased notably. During the 2017-2018 financial year clients now had an average of 3.3 issues in contrast to 2.7 average issues per client, which needed CAB help, during the 2016-2017 financial year. Citizens Advice's Services promoted early intervention and social prescribing, which reduced the need the allocation of resources further down the line. Financial modelling showed that every £1 invested into Citizen Advice Services in 2017/2018 resulted in £6.35 in savings to government and public resources.

Citizens Advice Surrey Heath currently had 58 active volunteers. Working with the CAB had enabled volunteers to live healthy and fulfilling lives. It had been found older volunteers had felt less isolated as a result of volunteering and a number of law students had found volunteering to be a good application of their learnt skills.

Arising from the Members' comments and questions the following points were noted:

- Citizens Advice had given invaluable support to a number of residents in Chobham. Whilst advice surgeries no longer took place in Chobham on a weekly basis, Chobham and nearby residents could continue to access CAB outreach sessions at Chobham Village Hall once a month, and at Chobham, Bisley and West End's Children's Centre.
- The organisation aimed to tackle domestic abuse by implementing an 'ASK scheme', which gave victims a safe space to disclose hidden, violence, following routine questions during reports of debt and housing issues. In addition the bureaux worked in collaboration with the National Centre for Domestic Abuse.
- The £80,000 Surrey Heath revenue grant, which Citizen's Advice Surrey was in receipt of, went to the infrastructure to enable CAB services including the costs of utilities and supervisors' salaries. Additional sources of funding allowed for case-specific training for volunteers such as on welfare benefit reform.
- Fiscal modelling had proven the economic benefit of the Citizens Advice Bureau's work on the public sector. It was underlined that Council Tax arrears was the most reported CAB debt problem and a reduction in CAB services would have a direct knock-on effect of greater numbers visiting GPs' surgeries.

The Committee thanked Kate Sawby for her informative presentation and for the ongoing, invaluable work of Citizens Advice Surrey.

18/EP Eikon

Shaffrina Barker, Youth and Community Work manager for Surrey Heath, and Nikki Hamilton, Lead Youth Worker and Fundraising Officer, gave a presentation in respect of the work of Eikon.

Eikon provided a range of services around school programmes, employability and work skills, building resilience and mental health wellbeing. Eikon aimed to continue to garner the ethos of its founder, Chris Hickford, who promoted proactive, rather than reactive work, with young people. Following Eikon's merger with the Windle Valley Youth project, Reflex Woking and the Lifetrain Trust, Eikon has allowed coordinated youth work to take place all across Surrey.

Eikon had successfully delivered the following services via schools to young people throughout Surrey Heath:

- Fostered strong and established relationships and worked in all three Surrey Heath secondary schools.
- Sexual health sessions, short resilience programmes, short courses and led on secondary school assemblies.
- Raised awareness and conducted staff whole school training on LGBT+ issues.
- Work with unaccompanied refugee young people.
- Work CAMHS to reintegrate young people back into school and rebuild mental resilience and provide emotional wellbeing support.

Eikon had facilitated a number of Youth Clubs throughout Surrey Heath:

- The HUB Youth club based in Deepcut aimed to integrate military families with non-military families and worked with the army to support local community events.
- The Friday Night Project, based at the Arena Leisure Centre, aimed to provide a holistic approach to youth work, via a mixture of sport and more traditional youth work activities. The project aimed to gain attendees from hard to reach areas and provided a mini-bus service for young people from the Old Dean.
- Chobham Youth Club which was the only youth club for teenagers in the Chobham area.

Arising from the Members' comments and questions the following points were noted:

- Eikon volunteers were specifically matched to volunteering assignments to ensure greater success for the young people and the volunteer. It was common for university students and "young volunteers" to work with youth clubs where they had previously attended or had specific experience.
- Eikon aimed to create themed programmes and act in synergy with Youth Clubs across Surrey. In addition the charity worked collaboratively and with different partnership organisations within the Old Dean.
- Specific Youth workers were trained to provide mental health first aid if needed. Moreover when working within schools youth workers had the ability to feedback to school staff in confidence in regard to pupils' mental wellbeing.
- Whilst it was likely that Surrey County Council (SCC) facilitated Youth work would experience funding cuts, it was recognised currently SCC only had 7 Youth and Community workers across Surrey. Eikon had the opportunity to extend and consolidate its niche; focussing on the fact that SCC youth work did not have a presence in schools.
- Outside schools, Eikon advertised their Youth Clubs and services via partnership working, such as with Accent and the Citizens Advice Bureau, social media and door to door leafletting.
- Unfortunately, whilst young people from the traveller community had previously attended Chobham Youth Club, it had been difficult to integrate the young people from the traveller and non-traveller communities. Any Eikon-facilitated Youth club aiming to engage the traveller community in the future would be run as a separate project.
- Eikon aimed for an equality of outcome for youth work throughout Surrey Heath and acknowledged specific groups and local communities would

require extra resources to achieve this. Furthermore individual projects to engage with different groups of young people in the community lent itself to separate funding bids and allocations.

19/EP External Partnerships Select Committee Work Programme

The Committee received a report and verbal update setting out its proposed work programme for the rest of the 2019/20 municipal year.

The Committee requested that it receives a presentation from Heathrow Noise Forum and representatives from the Heathrow Community Engagement Board (HCEB). It was noted that a presentation would be most appropriate following the published results of the Heathrow Expansion on expansion and airspace.

RESOLVED that

- I. Heathrow Noise Forum be invited to give an information presentation to the Committee for the 12 November 2019 Meeting,
- II. And the Council's outside body representative or relevant portfolio holder give an update on the work of the Heathrow Community Engagement Board.

Chairman