

**Minutes of a Meeting of the External Partnerships Select Committee held at Council Chamber, Surrey Heath House, Knoll Road, Camberley, GU15 3HD on 7 June 2022**

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+ Cllr Vivienne Chapman (Chairman)

+ Cllr Morgan Rise (Vice Chairman)

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| + Cllr Dan Adams         | - Cllr David Lewis       |
| + Cllr Richard Brooks    | + Cllr Emma-Jane McGrath |
| + Cllr Paul Deach        | - Cllr Liz Noble         |
| Cllr Tim FitzGerald      | + Cllr Pat Tedder        |
| + Cllr Mark Gordon       | + Cllr Valerie White     |
| + Cllr Josephine Hawkins |                          |

+ Present

- Apologies for absence presented

Substitutes: Cllr Edward Hawkins (In place of Cllr David Lewis) Cllr Graham Tapper

Members in Attendance: Cllr Rodney Bates, Cllr Sarah Jane Croke, Cllr Sashi Mylvaganam and Cllr Helen Whitcroft

Officers Present: Jayne Boitout and Louise Livingston

## **1/EP Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2022 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

## **2/EP Accent Housing**

The Committee received a presentation from Julie Wittich, Executive Director of Assets & Sustainability, Accent Housing in respect of recent management changes and the appointment of a new main repairs and maintenance contractor.

Since its last presentation to the Committee in February 2022, there had been a restructure of the Accent Leadership Team, including the appointment of a new interim director, Shaun Finnegan, for the South region. The recruitment process for the vacant post was underway and was being led by Claire Stone.

Ian Williams had been appointed as the South Region's new main repairs and maintenance contractor from 30 May 2022 and immediately started picking up the circa 1500 outstanding maintenance orders which the previous contractor Axis Europe had left. The most urgent repairs were being prioritised and analysis of the outstanding cases was being undertaken by a line by line exercise. Despite some jobs such as plastering and groundworks were being allocated to sub-contractors, it was still anticipated that the maintenance backlog left by Axis Europe would still

take 6 months in order to clear. In addition, some jobs such as fencing was anticipated to take a particularly long time.

Ian Williams were keen to do joint engagement events across the region in the summer in coordination with Accent and the Council. Furthermore, joint branding was starting to be rolled out in areas such as maintenance vans in order to promote synergy between Ian Williams and Accent.

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

- Accent Housing was struggling to recruit in respect of some technical maintenance roles. This was part of a wider national issue and Accent were looking to use market supplements in order to recruit the right staff which would be able to successfully tackle an increasing amount of mould and damp cases.
- On 1 October 2022 Accent would be launching a technical contact centre to receive new maintenance calls from its customers. Advisors would have duty surveyors on-call to provide live advice as well as a diagnostic tool. The change to a more specialised contact centre worked off the premise that contact centre advisors would develop a more specialised knowledge after taking solely maintenance related calls. On their recruitment, advisors would also undergo an intensive 4 week training programme before contact with customers.
- Ian Williams had been appointed at the end of the tender process, after it had demonstrated an excellent track record in the Accent North West and East regions and that they shared similar values to Accent. Ian Williams specialised in serving housing associations and had the ethos of investing in their staff and were also keen on direct delivery (rather than use of subcontractors).
- The Customer Relationship Management System would allow contact centre advisors to review system notes, and case history whilst engaging with customers.
- In previous years Accent had a policy of ripping out and disposing of any previously-used carpets, when new residents moved into a property. The pulling up of carpet was no longer an automatic part of changeover processes, but it was noted that it was found that carpets were rarely left in an acceptable state. Accent employed surveyors who were responsible for recommendation of any work which needed to be undertaken before future inhabitation.
- Where Accent contractors had failed to turn up for a prearranged maintenance appointment, residents who had been forced to take a day off work and were financially worse off as a result, were entitled to claim compensation. However this wasn't routinely offered to all residents who had suffered from a missed maintenance appointment.
- In order to meet the goal of making Accent properties more sustainable, Accent ensured that all its new properties achieved an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of A. Furthermore, it was noted that Accent was in the process of retrofitting some of its existing properties as part of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Funds scheme.

Following the Committee's discussions it was remarked that although the Committee were grateful for Accent's virtual attendance at the meeting, they would much prefer them to send representatives to attend in person where possible. It was also noted that the Committee were especially keen to see how much progress had been made with the maintenance backlog 6 months into the Ian Williams contract.

Furthermore, Members noted the upcoming all-Member briefing from Accent Housing and acknowledged the recently set up email address to provide a single point of contact for all Surrey Heath Councillors' Accent-related enquiries.

The Committee thanked Julie for her attendance and her presentation.

### **3/EP Surrey Police**

The Committee received a presentation from Inspector Gemma Taylor in respect of the priorities and challenges in respect of Policing within the borough.

The Specialist Neighbourhood Team worked alongside the Neighbourhood Policing Team and was focussed on long term problem solving and community impact. A recent restructure of the team meant that one sergeant now line-managed the Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and Neighbourhood Support Officers (NSOs) in a specified geographical area and was responsible for specific thematical priorities. As a result of the restructure, PCSOs and NSOs were now aligned to the same shift pattern which enabled better opportunities to work together with partners to problem solve and show presence in their communities.

Under this structure, Sargeants held a People, Groups and Places meeting every three weeks with their teams. This was where emerging trends and ongoing problem solving topics were discussed. Data was used from various sources and was used to define priorities and to evaluate threat, harm and risk. Each team gave input from this meeting into a briefing document, which was then shared with the Neighbourhood Policing Team so that they were aware of developing areas of work when responding to incidents. Furthermore, regular force and divisional level briefings meant officers and staff received an overview of the current trends in relation to crime in Surrey Heath. Current priorities included areas of burglary, violence against women and girls, anti-social behaviour, anti-social driving/use of motor vehicles and local feuds.

The Joint Neighbourhood Survey for the 21/22 year showed that 84.4% of respondents had confidence in their neighbourhood force, and 61.5% were in agreement that the police were dealing with the crime and ASB issues that mattered in the area. Whereas 40.8% agreed that the neighbourhood police were seen in the places and times when needed. In order to increase the confidence in this latter area further, the Neighbourhood Team had changed their communications in order to post their foot patrols in order to boost confidence.

It was highlighted that compared with the same 1 year period, one year ago, there had been the following changes in total crimes:

- A rise of non-domestic abuse violence by 146 which could be attributed partially by the end to mandated social distancing.
- Increased thefts of a motor vehicle by 21%.
- A 21% drop in residential burglaries, which was the biggest reduction in the Western Division.
- A 1.7% reduction of domestic abuse without injury including a 42% increase in solved cases.

The 21% increase in car thefts could be largely attributed to keyless car thefts and 62 offences had taken place in Surrey between 1 January 2022 and 20 May 2022, including 12 offences in Surrey Heath. Incidences were incredibly hard to predict due to a lack of patterns in respect of time or location. Easily implemented preventative matters to defer keyless car thefts included deactivation of keyless entry systems, use of steering locks and use of faraday bags.

In addition, joint agency and cross border meetings were now being undertaken to solve the continued problem of anti-social car meets along the A331 at Watchmoor Business Park. So far a dispersal order had been put in place to cover the business park and 80 community protection warnings had been issued following the first weekend of implementation. Longer-term an application had been submitted to trial noise cameras along the A331 and funding had been secured for further Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras.

Following, the recent murder of a local individual, it was noted that plans were already being put in place regarding prevention work by Youth Engagement Officers and Anti-Social behaviour specialists. This included contextualisation meetings with Surrey County Council to better understand how groups of young people interacted across force boundaries. The knife amnesty program was also extended for the foreseeable future.

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

- Whilst the Rural Crime Portfolio may naturally fit better with the Six Villages responsibility, there were other considerations which needed to be considered during the creation of the organisational structure of the neighbourhood team such as team dynamics.
- There had been an ongoing issue with various crimes and Anti-Social behaviour which took place at Southcote Park in Parkside Ward. Whilst, it hadn't been a focus of the Specialist Neighbourhood Team, this would be reviewed following the meeting. There had already been discussions between partners in respect of initiatives to deter crime taking place such as better street lighting.
- In addition to the Victims of Crime Survey, The Joint Neighbourhood Survey provided quarterly results around public confidence, local problematic issues, crime prevention and contacting the police. Further information on how the survey was conducted would be circulated to the Committee after the meeting.
- Whilst video doorbell footage was a useful tool to residents' groups and neighbourhood watches, in order to maintain a data-led approach to policing, residents needed to report any instances of crime or suspicious behaviour to the police.

- The Safer Neighbourhood team benefitted from a strong relationship with the Military of Defence (MoD) in respect of Barossa Common. It was felt by Members that a similar beneficial relationship in respect of MoD owned land in Deepcut could be replicated to tackle ASB issues such as the lighting of fires.
- A column for the Borough Commander in Heathscene could be considered for future issues.
- There had been consideration of free provision of faraday bags by Surrey Police in order to reduce keyless car thefts. However, it was noted that most Mercedes Benz and BMW owners would be able to afford to purchase such a bag, and the challenge instead laid with highlighting the risk to residents.
- If information sharing protocols allowed, there was a potential opportunity for Surrey Police to correspond better with Surrey County Councillors in order to facilitate better highway safety.

Members thanked Inspector Taylor for her informative report and time answering questions. The Committee agreed that it would like to see the Borough Commander present again to the Committee again in approximately 6 months' time.

#### **4/EP OPCC Police and Crime Panel – Update from Surrey Heath Panel Member**

The Committee received a verbal update from Councillor Valerie White, the Council's appointed member of the Surrey Police and Crime Panel.

The Surrey Police and Crime Panel was underpinned by the governance and accountability arrangements detailed in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. The role of the Panel was to examine the actions and decisions of Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and to make sure information was available for the public so that they could hold the Police and Crime Commissioner to account.

The Panel was a committee of Surrey County Council, and consisted of one elected councillor from each of Surrey's twelve local authorities and two co-opted independent members.

The Panel held the PCC to account in a constructive manner by review of her policies and crime plan; and the subsequent making of reports and recommendations. Furthermore the PCC's annual report was specifically scrutinised during a fully-attended public meeting. A confirmation hearing was held where the Panel made a recommendation as to the appointment of a Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner (Deputy PCC).

Following Committee discussion, it was advised that the panel voted to recommend that Ellie Vesey- Thompson was not appointed to the role of Deputy PCC, despite a claim that she would be invaluable given a prediction that the role would amount to spending 75% of her time with young people. The Panel was due to receive a report at the end of the month in respect of how the position had progressed over the past year.

It was also noted that at the time of the setting of the PCC Council Tax precept, whilst the Panel made alternative budgetary recommendations on how the money would be spent to the PCC, these recommendations were not accepted.

The Committee felt that there was room for the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to better promote the recommendations and work undertaken by the Police and Crime Panel and noted out of date information on its website.

Members thanked Councillor Valerie White for her informative update and endorsed receiving future similar updates in a verbal or written form.

## **5/EP Bisley Village Hall**

The Committee received a presentation from Russell Hayes, Trustee of Bisley Village Hall.

Bisley Village Hall was a former school chapel, which had been donated for community use in 1959 and was then supplemented by the addition of an extension in 1982. The management committee comprised of 3 elected members and up to 7 members representing the organisations which used the hall. The aim of the hall was 'to provide a community facility, in good working order, for use of as wide a range of local groups as possible'.

The hall offered a large and medium sized hall; with a 200 and 60 capacity respectively. A kitchen allowed the hosting of a community café, parties and events. The community café also facilitated an opportunity to keep an eye of the wellbeing of residents, as café users were often elderly and vulnerable. The community café had raised funds for a defibrillator at the hall and organisers also kept in touch with attendees via a phone call every week when the café was closed because of the pandemic.

The hall hosted a range of users, such as exercise classes, craft and music groups, as well as groups such as spring tots, messy church and a new marital arts group.

The Strawberry Fair, which had run since 1993 and had raised a total of £100,000 since its inception, was the hall's major fundraiser. During the years of the pandemic, the hall's income plummeted and income from regular hall users had not yet recovered to 2019/20 levels. During the years of the pandemic ad-hoc hall bookings increased dramatically and grant funding, for example from the Council-run charity enabling fund, had meant the hall was able to break even without sacrificing scheduled major projects.

The 3 major risks to the hall were the fabric of the hall, the loss of skills and enthusiasm of the trustees, and the loss of the users of the hall and the hall's positive relationship with the community. The vulnerability of the latter was highlighted by the loss of 2 major users: LESTA dance school and Bisley pre-school during the pandemic.

Looking to the future, the hall's trustees were prioritising work, such as the replacement of windows at the stage end of the main hall, and the treatment of damp which had been identified by a damp survey earlier in the year. Energy efficiency measures were also being prioritised.

Whilst the village hall held reservations in respect of the long term resilience of its trustees and felt new personnel would provide a new perspective, many village halls would be envious of the hall's trustee base. An absence of trustees for community centres across the borough was widespread. It was agreed by the Committee that a broader editorial piece around village halls and volunteering opportunities and trusteeships could be included in Heathscene.

Members also noted that issues faced by Bisley Village Hall were identical to the issues which were being experienced in the other borough wards; and that engagement with Voluntary Support North Surrey maybe helpful in both recruitment and development of volunteers and trustees.

The Committee thanked Russell for his presentation and his attendance.

## **6/EP Committee Work Programme**

The Committee discussed its work programme for the rest of the municipal year. It was proposed by the Chairman that Voluntary Support North Surrey would be removed from the work programme as they had already presented to the Committee during 2021. Instead it was proposed that Heatherside Community Centre and Harper Asprey Wildlife Rescue should present at the Committee's November meeting.

It was also suggested and agreed that the Basingstoke Canal Authority and the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership should present at the Committee where possible during the 2022/23 municipal year, and if not during the start of the 2023/24 municipal year.

**RESOLVED that the changes above to the Committee Work Programme be made.**

Chairman