

SUPPORT AND SAFEGUARDING EXECUTIVE PORTFOLIO UPDATE

Summary

To consider a progress report on the Support and Safeguarding Portfolio

Portfolio: Support and Safeguarding

Wards Affected: n/a

Recommendation

The Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee is advised to note the update.

1. Key Issues

- 1.1 Within the Regulatory Service, the Support and Safeguarding Portfolio covers the following areas:
- Voluntary Sector & Community Partnerships
 - Grant schemes
 - Community Safety
 - Safeguarding
 - Equalities
 - Private Sector Housing and Disabled Facilities Grants
 - Housing Solutions
 - Family Support

2. Supporting Information

Voluntary Sector & Community Partnerships

- 2.1 The Council has a tradition whereby it values the work undertaken by our voluntary organisations enormously and it has worked hard over the past 20 years to ensure of its collaborative approach to partnership working.

3. Covid 19

- 3.1 Over the past year the community have responded to the pandemic in many creative ways. During the first lockdown Surrey Heath Prepared was launched and the Council were proud to partner with them. Also, during this time with the aim of assisting the Council introduced the Covid-19 Scheme, when open it awarded 25 grants at a value of £60,573.
- 3.2 As a Council we agreed to award in September 2020 our full allocation received by DEFRA of £40,922 to help alleviate local hardship and this was awarded to both local foodbanks, the Besom £29,000 and Woking Foodbank £11,922 to enable their operation to continue in meeting the demand for food parcels.

Covid Champions

- 3.3 The Council has also initiated with Surrey County Council and Frimley/Heartlands ICS (Integrated Care Service) a Covid Champions network, which aims to dispel the myth and rumour relating to this virus and the vaccination process. The membership currently stands at 33 community representatives who receive weekly updates, and fortnightly webinars to disseminate correct information using their network of contacts.

4. Grant Schemes

Community Fund Grants *

- 4.1 The Community Fund Grant scheme has continued to operate over the past year, with very limited applications being received during this time. This led to the Executive seeking a review of grants that fell into this area at its meeting in October 2020. At the February 2021 Executive, recommendations were supported which will see the newly introduced Emergency Food Poverty Scheme being bolstered by a further £50,000 and remain open until 31st March 2022. It was noted that a number of grant schemes that were to be included as part of the review are newly introduced and it is too early to evaluate their impact. Grants that fall into this area will be evaluated throughout this year and considered at the November Executive, the aim being to ensure that our local needs and priorities continue to be met beyond the pandemic.

Revenue Grants

- 4.2 The Executive awarded 10 revenue grants at its meeting on the 19th January, it has an annual budget of £200,000 which range in value from £1,500- £80,000. These will become effective from the 1st April and will be subject to service level agreements. This is a clear demonstration of the Council's ongoing community commitment to local organisations who provide crucial services within Surrey Heath. This scheme is fully inclusive to all not-for-profit organisations who deliver services locally.

Ward Councillor Grant

- 4.3 A new grant scheme supporting Surrey Heath's community groups and charities via their Ward Councillors was introduced in December 2020. Each Ward Councillor has a £1,000 budget for this scheme for the remainder of this financial year (until the 31 March 2021) and can award small grants, up to a maximum of £500, with 10 awards made to date, with a value of £4,360. Thereafter, Councillors will have an annual allocation of £1,500.

Surrey Heath Lottery

- 4.4 This initiative exemplifies the good practice of community development, in supporting 'local for local' at its best. The scheme launched on the 13th July 2019, and since that time has continued to evolve and grow, it now has 63 groups who have signed up as local good causes who are able to benefit. During the pandemic ticket sales dipped slightly but during the past quarter this is starting to improve with 818 ticket sales per week, with good causes receiving £25,521 per year.
- 4.5 We have been fortunate as in November 2020, a local resident won the top prize of £25,000 and in January 2021, another local winner of £2,000. This type of positive publicity helps retain this local scheme.

- 4.6 Each ticket is priced at £1 and from that 60% of the funds raised are allocated to local (not for profit) good causes, and if an organisation is selected as a preferred option through the scheme they will receive 50%, with 10% allocated to a central allocation fund. The prize money is set at 20% plus 17% which is retained by Gatherwell as the external lottery manager who operate the scheme on behalf of the Council, with 3% VAT (which is re-claimed and is used to contribute towards the annual lottery operating licence fee). The odds are a 1 in 50 chance of winning a prize, and a 1 in a million chance of winning £25,000.
- 4.7 For the local organisation there is no cost to join, and they can benefit from receiving additional funding. Another advantage to the lottery is that the organisations will also want to promote the lottery as a way of their supporters giving, but also having a chance to win.

The Surrey Heath Annual Community Lottery Award Scheme

- 4.8 This scheme awarded its first grants in December 2020, a total of nearly £8,000 was given to eight local organisations who were successful in applying for grants from money raised.

5. Poverty Working Group

- 5.1 At its meeting on 16th February 2020, the Executive considered a report on Poverty in Surrey Heath. At this meeting it agreed that a study would be undertaken to identify and understand the community groups that operated in St Michaels and Old Dean, and Watchetts wards. This helps to understand what services are currently offered and what is required to support those living in poverty. An outline action plan would then be produced that could address this inequality, together with clear improvement measures.
- 5.2 It is recognised that the impact from the pandemic has affected us all universally and the previous poverty landscape is subject to change. The Government Furlough scheme has shielded the true picture of this local effect on our economies, and the loss of employment and the full extent of this is becoming clearer with the need for the Council to assist where possible.
- 5.3 A Poverty Working Group was formed in October/November 2020 which comprises of community representatives, voluntary sector, Surrey Heath CCG, Councillors, and officers who have progressed this work so far and implemented a number of local initiatives in partnership with Citizens Advice Surrey Heath, Old Dean Community Group etc. all designed to provide assistance where most required considering that the poverty landscape constantly evolves during and post pandemic.
- 5.4 Through the work undertaken via this group the Emergency Food Poverty Grant scheme has been introduced as mentioned previously * plus the Hardship fund which is delivered by Citizens Advice Surrey Heath. There has also been a computer for schools scheme put in place which has re-cycled Council equipment distributed to schools with pupils in need. The Frimley Fuel Allotments & the Lions Club have been instrumental providing schools with funds and equipment.
- 5.5 It was agreed by the Council Executive for the Poverty Working Group to host an all-Councillor Poverty meeting as soon as possible.

6. Community Safety

- 6.1 The Crime and Disorder Act was enacted in 1998 and places a statutory duty on all local authorities together with their partnership agencies to develop and deliver a Community Safety Strategy. This is managed by the Surrey Heath Partnership which combines the Community Safety Partnership and the Local Strategic Partnership and is chaired by the Leader of the Council with a membership from both statutory and voluntary partners who meet up to 4 times a year to receive partner updates.
- 6.2 The Annual Plan was considered at the Surrey Heath Partnership meeting on the 24th February 2021 is provided as annex A and provides specifics as to where the local focus is for the year 2021/22, key issues were linked to serious and organised crime, new domestic abuse legislation and the review of the partnership TOR.
- 6.3 The CHaRMM (Community Harm and Risk Management Meeting) and the JAG (Joint Action Group) has the operational responsibility in managing the day-to-day incidents and risks of both people and places.
- 6.4 In September 2020, the Council as part of the Crime and Policing Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2014, undertook a short consultation exercise and extended the existing Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO) for a further 3 years. This gives proportionate powers to both the Council and Surrey Police to be able to deal effectively with low level anti-social behaviour.

7. Safeguarding

- 7.1 The Safeguarding Champions (officer group) meet regularly to review the training needs on ongoing support for both staff and elected members to ensure that our statutory responsibilities are fulfilled in this area.
- 7.2 The Council is represented at both the officer and elected member Children's and Adult Safeguarding Surrey meeting to ensures we are aware of any changing procedures. Our responsibilities from the Section 11 audit are up to date with the latest audited submitted on the 31st October 2020.

8. Children's Champion

- 8.1 Within my portfolio I, am the Councils Children's champion and represent the Borough at events such as Junior Citizen, Local Democracy week and Save Drive, Stay Alive. These are events run for the children in the Borough, however throughout the pandemic the events, have been paused and not hosted but will be reviewed when the present restrictions are lifted.

9. Equalities

- 9.1 The Member Equality Working group met in February 2021 and August 2020, with agenda items consisting of:
- A review of the Equalities Strategy, which was approved and is to be considered for adoption by the Executive at its April 21 meeting.
 - An equal opportunities survey was completed by staff, key findings discussed, and actions agreed.

- Introduction of a template that enables EWG members to agree annually the events (outside of civil events) the Council wishes to commemorate.

10. Private Sector Housing Enforcement

- 10.1 The housing stock within the Borough is generally in good condition and there have been no prosecutions this year. There are, however, a number of cases ongoing. Where concerns about the quality of a property arise, the Council always seeks to find the quickest way to resolve issues for tenants and landlords. While every complaint could potentially lead to prosecution, officers continue to have a strong track record of securing the best outcome without the ultimate sanction of prosecution but is a useful tool for landlords who are reluctant to fulfil their obligations.

Enforcement and Houses in Multiple Occupation

- 10.2 The Team deal with disrepair in resident's homes and manage standards in the private rented sector, including the licensing of Houses in Multiple occupation (HMOs). During 2020 the Team responded to 110 housing complaints relating to repairs and disrepair issues. This is a 30% increase in complaints from 2019 and is likely to reflect the issues arising as tenants spend more time at home due to Covid19 restrictions. The team licensed 17 HMOs after ensuring that they met the required standards.

Clearances/ Hoarders

- 10.3 There have been no clearances of housing due to hoarding in 2020. The team undertook 55 housing inspections in 2020. This is a significant reduction in inspections compared to 2019 and again reflects the constraints imposed by Covid19 restrictions.

Public Health Funerals

- 10.4 The Housing team provided 3 public health funerals.

Disabled Facilities Grant

- 10.5 The Private Sector Housing Team also acts as the Council's Home Improvement Agency and delivers the Council's mandatory and discretionary grants programme, including Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), used to adapt and improve the homes of disabled and vulnerable residents. These works support independence, keeps people in their homes in the community and delays moves to care. By adapting and improving the home environment the work seeks to reduce hospital admissions and, when residents have been ill, support re-enablement. This work is currently fully funded by government grant (£779,111 in 2020/21) and so currently costs the Council nothing. The DFG is mandatory which means that where the adaptations sought are essential and the proposed works are necessary and appropriate to meet the persons needs and reasonable and practicable given the age and condition of the property then the grant must be paid. The maximum amount of grant that can normally be paid is £30,000 and can be means tested. The Council uses independent occupational health advisors to assist with bids and work with applicants to ensure schemes meet their needs.

- 10.6 In 2020 the team agreed 119 grants, oversaw completion of works on 98 homes and a further 21 projects have yet to start. Types of works agreed include stair lifts,

shower rooms/bathroom adaptations, access issues (e.g. doors, ramps, etc.), scooter stores and vehicular access. This complements the work of the Community Services Team who deliver adaptations such as key safes and the Home Handyman Service.

Homelessness

- 10.7 The Housing Solutions Team deals with housing advice and homelessness in the Borough and seeks to deliver solutions for those who are risk of or are homeless. Between 1st January 2020 and 31st December 2020, the Housing Solutions Team received 487 approaches from households whose housing situation was likely to lead to homelessness without intervention or who were already homeless at the time they sought help.
- 10.8 From these approaches 214 households were either threatened with homelessness (i.e. would be homeless in the next 56 days) or actually homeless at the time they approached the Council therefore triggering a homelessness duty under the homelessness Reduction Act 2017.
- 10.9 When a household is at risk of becoming homeless the Council has a duty to assess their needs and produce a Personal Housing Plan, setting out the action the household and the Council will take to relieve their homelessness. If someone has a priority need, i.e. they have children or are vulnerable in some way, there is a duty to provide temporary accommodation during this relief period. There is not a duty to provide accommodation to households who do not have a priority need.
- 10.10 While in the preceding year there was actually the same number of approaches (487) those approaches led to 314 homelessness applications. The reason for the reduced number of applications is due to Covid 19, notably due to the eviction bans in the private sector but also other factors like households being able to remain with extended family. The lower number of applications from the same number of approaches is therefore likely to represent a delayed need that will present once Covid 19 restrictions ease.
- 10.11 Of the 214 households that applied, 64 households were found to have the main housing duty owed to them, which means they had priority need and the Council were not able to relieve their homelessness. This gives rise to a duty to provide them with temporary accommodation until settled housing can be found. At the time of writing there were 27 households in temporary accommodation (Lawrence Lodge or Darwin Court) and 4 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
- 10.12 A further 60 households had their homelessness prevented through case work that enabled them to remain in their current home or finding a planned move before they became homeless, or having an alternative home secured after becoming homeless. This is down from 106 the previous year. Again, this represents the impact of Covid 19 with lets in the private sector contracting during the year.
- 10.13 Of the remaining 90 these are either open cases, have secured their own housing, ceased to be owed a homelessness duty (usually because they have found accommodation) or have stopped engaging with the service.
- 10.14 Even with eviction bans in place for much of the year the main cause of homelessness continues to be loss of accommodation in the private rented sector. As noted Covid 19 has impacted on the availability of accommodation in the sector however often households who approach would have previously secured another

tenancy but are having difficulty in finding a property they can afford. Rents in the private sector continue to outstrip the help available through the benefits system, as demonstrated in the table below.

Table: Snapshot of rents in Camberley January 2021

Property size	Average rent p.c.m	Local housing allowance p.c.m
1 bedroom	£865	£698
2 bedroom	£1085	£873
3 bedroom	£1366	£1097

Rough Sleeping

- 10.15 The number of single homeless residents continues to be high with the most visible cases being those who are rough sleeping. The Council is required to do an annual count or estimate of the number of rough sleepers out on a given night in November.
- 10.16 In 2020 the count identified 7 individuals, down from 12 the previous year.
- 10.17 When Covid 19 restrictions started in March 2020 there was a call from Government to bring all rough sleepers in. This was a request not a new duty however the Council, working with the Hope Hub, identified rough sleepers over the first lockdown and provided accommodation. This was mostly a mix of bed and breakfast and serviced apartments.
- 10.18 In total 31 individuals were placed during this period. All were offered move on assistance and the opportunity to remain in the accommodation for up to 6 months however when the lock down ended a number refused support and to pay for the accommodation and either left the accommodation or were evicted. Outcomes detailed in the table below.

Table: Covid 19 'Everyone in' Placements

Moved on to settled accommodation	18
Refused offers of alternative accommodation	2
Placement ended due to abandonment, non-engagement, non-payment of rent or anti-social behaviour	11

- 10.19 In response to this demand from single homeless residents the Council has made two consecutive successful bids to the Government's Rough Sleeping Initiative to provide accommodation and support services to this client group. The funding of £145,000 has provided:
 - A Single Homeless Support Worker based at the Council and supporting residents in Connaught Court (see below);
 - Joint funding with Surrey Heath CCG for a mental health worker based at the Hope Hub; and,
 - Revenue funding to support setting up a Night Stop facility for rough sleepers.
- 10.20 The Council has used developer contributions to buy Connaught Court from Accent, a 10-bed unit to provide accommodation and support for up to two years for single

homeless individuals and are in the process of purchasing 5/6 bed property for a Night Stop, to be delivered by the Hope Hub.

- 10.21 The Council was also successful in securing a Surrey County Council contract and funding of £50,000 pa to deliver Floating Housing Support.
- 10.22 While the impacts of Covid 19 are set to increase demand on the service both through the end of the eviction ban and the economic impact on individual households, the Team were already monitoring the impact of the roll out of Universal Credit (UC). Evidence to date is anecdotal but early impacts noted include:
 - increased rent arrears reported amongst housing association tenants;
 - a reluctance of private landlords to take households on UC where the Council has lost the ability to pay Housing Benefit direct; and,
 - reported hardship from resident's subject to delays in payment and/or sanctions.
- 10.23 This is against the background of an increase of 300% in UC claims over the period of the pandemic.

11. Family Support

- 11.1 The Family Support Service was originally supported through a funding programme that was due to end in 2021. Within Surrey the programme was run in partnership with the Boroughs and Districts delivering the programme on behalf of Surrey County Council. Following the OFSTED review of Surrey Children's Services, it was noted that the Family Support programme was successfully delivering an Early Help Programme for Surrey for a lower cost per family and was able to chart and track family progress and the progress of those stepped down from the service. Much of the approach was recognised as best practice.
- 11.2 Following on from this Surrey County Council (SCC) has decided to continue with the service and is now matching the previous level of government funding and in addition providing extra funding to introduce social workers into the programme. Due to a poor response to the advert for Social Workers (across all Surrey B&Ds) SCC agreed that teams could recruit an additional Family Support Coordinator for each borough on a 12- month fixed term contract (the new Coordinators have commenced employment at Surrey Heath and Runnymede). The expectation is that we will recruit two Social Workers for the team in January 2022. The revised programme now recognises the level of challenge in families that the service has in practice been working to for a number of years. Runnymede and Surrey Heath Borough Councils both also now provide some top up funding for the service.
- 11.3 Between Oct/Nov 2019 to date the two teams have worked with 150 families.

Refugee Resettlement Programme

- 11.4 In addition, the Family Support teams runs the UKRS (UK Resettlement Scheme) previously known as the vulnerable persons resettlement scheme on behalf of Surrey Heath and Runnymede.
- 11.5 The scheme started slowly as the council was unable to identify properties in the private sector which has impacted on the Councils commitment to house 10 families by 2020. Unfortunately, due to Covid19 and the ongoing restrictions, the scheme

was paused in March 2020. We are still awaiting a decision from the ministers in regard to the restart of the scheme. There are currently 5 refugee families in the Borough, with the most recently family having arrived 10th March 2020.

- 11.6 The families in Surrey Heath are well settled, the children were all doing well in school however, due to Covid there have been some setbacks with the online learning, but this being managed very well. The families have created a strong community network between them, supporting each other in accessing local facilities especially when new families arrive.
- 11.7 The biggest problems that families continue to face is Universal Credit (UC) and applying for Personal Independence Payments (PIP). The UC claims are made within a week of the family arriving (biometric residents permits have to arrive, then bank accounts are applied for, only then UC can be applied for).
- 11.8 Although the aim from DWP is that UC payments begin within 5 weeks of the application, this is rarely the case, with most initial payments being made to a family 6-8 weeks after the initial claim has been made. As rent payments are all paid in advance, it means that the family are in rental arrears as soon as they arrive in the UK, with this becoming even more difficult when having to wait potentially 2 months for their first UC payment to be received.
- 11.9 The Home Office has tried to address this with their funding to LA's, by providing £100 per person in the family specifically to bridge the gap on waiting for UC to be paid. The team have trialled different ways of using this money and found that the most efficient is to pay it directly to Accent Housing to go towards the families rent account. Each family also takes an advance UC payment on initial claim to try and bridge the gap (£400) however this is a loan which the family have to pay back over a period of months, meaning the money they receive from their UC claim to begin with is reduced. The team work very closely with Accent housing to ensure they are aware of the situation, and that payment plans are set up to clear rental arrears.
- 11.10 Often the eligibility of a family resettling in the UK is around adult disability. The government eligibility for claiming PIP is that the individual has lived in the UK for 2 out of the last 3 years. Refugees resettling in the UK under the UKRS are an exception to this eligibility criteria. However, this is sometimes not properly explained to the DWP teams and therefore it can take a number of phone calls, applications and meetings to finally speak with someone who is aware of the exception for the families. This is very time consuming and can take months to overcome.

Annexes	SHP Annual Plan 2021/2021
Background Papers	None
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