

**Minutes of a Meeting of the External  
Partnerships Select Committee held at  
Council Chamber, Surrey Heath  
House, Knoll Road, Camberley, GU15  
3HD on 7 September 2021**

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+ Cllr Vivienne Chapman (Chairman)

+ Cllr Morgan Rise (Vice Chairman)

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| + Cllr Dan Adams        | + Cllr Josephine Hawkins |
| + Cllr Richard Brooks   | + Cllr David Lewis       |
| + Cllr Sarah Jane Croke | + Cllr Emma-Jane McGrath |
| + Cllr Paul Deach       | + Cllr Pat Tedder        |
| + Cllr Tim FitzGerald   | + Cllr Helen Whitcroft   |
| - Cllr Mark Gordon      |                          |

+ Present

- Apologies for absence presented

Members in Attendance: Cllr Rodney Bates, Cllr Cliff Betton, Cllr Victoria Wheeler and Cllr Sashi Mylvaganam

Officers Present: Jayne Boitout and Louise Livingston

**7/EP Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2021 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

**8/EP Accent Housing**

The Committee received a presentation from Holly Sheppard, Contract Manager, in respect of the ongoing maintenance issues in relation to Accent properties within Surrey Heath.

Accent undertook circa 12,000 repairs per year for its properties within Surrey Heath. However, it was underlined that performance of the maintenance service was not as Accent expected or felt to be acceptable. Following an unsuccessful change of maintenance contractor, Axis Europe was appointed as Accent's main maintenance contractor during November 2019. Going into March 2020, Axis Europe was carrying a large backlog of maintenance cases which had been inherited from Accent's previous maintenance contractor, CHS. As a result of the emerging COVID-19 pandemic, during March 2020 an 8 week pause on non-routine repairs was implemented.

As a result of the pandemic, during the summer of 2020 a new backlog of repair cases emerged as a result of customers shielding, limited access to properties and national lockdowns. Furthermore, Axis Europe had experienced recruitment and retention issues in respect of operatives; and the maintenance programme had suffered from a lack of availability of materials as a result of Brexit. As it stood, there was a particular lack of availability in respect of timber, concrete and fencing.

Whilst it was targeted that all repairs would be completed within 15 days, during 2021/22 only 65.8% were completed within the targeted time period. On the other hand whilst, still not yet at the target mean average score of 4.5; reported customer satisfaction was at 4.18 during 2021/22. Furthermore room for improvement in respect of the repairs service was also underlined by the repair service experiencing a customer satisfaction (CSAT) score of 2.72. This was in contrast to the 4.75 average CSAT score which planned servicing cases managed to achieve between June 2021 and August 2021. In order to improve customer satisfaction, Accent met with its gas heating contractor, TSG Building Services, on a fortnightly basis to discuss implementation of its service improvement plan and to promote consistency on its repair quality.

Looking at an overview of cases which were being dealt with under the formal complaints process, there were currently 80 open complaints relating to 2.7% of properties. 74 complaints related to repairs or planned works. The remaining complaints related to lettings, grounds maintenance or colleagues. Only 3 complaints were currently with the Housing ombudsman. When any complaint was dealt with, Accent aimed for an early resolution and now only closed complaints when they received confirmation that the customer was satisfied with the repair service; and not just post-repair as previously.

Accent aimed to complete a large capital works programme during the 21/22 financial year, which totalled to £4.4 million and would make a total of 1,006 improvements to Accent properties including bathrooms, boiler, radiator and roof upgrades.

In respect of partnership working, Accent had supported the Trussell Trust's 'More than Homes', campaign and offered arrears support to 200 customers. Locally Accent were represented on both the Community Support Working Group and the Old Dean, St Michaels and Watchetts Poverty Group and had housed 5 refugees in conjunction with the Council as part of the Afghan resettlement programme.

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

- With reference to past problems with the heating systems at Cranmore Court, Accent were confident that its gas heating contractor TSG were ready and had enough capacity to adequately deal with any potential spike in heating and hot water related maintenance orders during the winter. During the winter, Accent also ran a 4 hour emergency repair service in relation to hot water and heating repairs. Accent also actively flagged vulnerable residents to its contractors; so TSG and its other appointed contractors were able to prioritise such cases.
- Councillors had received complaints that major works were conducted in an uncoordinated, piecemeal fashion and to a poor quality. Even though Accent had specific standards and specifications it had previously agreed with the contractor in relation to kitchen replacements; not all planned works were completed to a satisfactory standard. Customers had also reported that major works weren't conducted simultaneously on a property, and thus exacerbating the associated disruption on its residents. In addition, Councillors had received reports of the contractors' representatives

suggesting that there was a different standard between private sector repairs and an Accent Housing repair.

- There had previously been an issue experienced by Cranmore Court residents, when upgraded combination boilers had been installed and found to be incompatible with the existing older central heating system. In response to this all radiators in Cranmore Court properties had been surveyed, and replaced where needed, in addition to the removal of any 3 port valves.
- It was felt that in the event of a future lockdown and when undertaking contingency planning, Accent should look to open its properties' communal lounges quicker than it did during previous lockdowns. It was suggested that communal lounges offered a safer place to meet than a local café or pub.
- Better communication and customer service featured heavily in Accent's maintenance service improvement plan. It was noted that Councillors had found Accent residents to be understanding of delays and shortfalls in respect of the maintenance service if they had been well informed and updated. Axis Europe had recently employed a new customer service manager and it was felt that Axis' staff return to the office lent itself to better customer service.
- Accent's planned maintenance programme's resilience was questioned, as Accent had awarded both Ockley Contractors and Kinraig Construction contracts, despite being owned by the same parent company. However, Accent's procurement process considered financial viability aspects and acknowledged that a shift to another contractor would always be kept as a potential option.
- As it stood Accent had no plans to introduce a mandatory full vaccination status amongst its frontline staff. However, it strongly encouraged twice weekly testing amongst its customer facing staff and maintained standards of social distancing and the use of Personal Protective Equipment during visits to customers' homes.

The Committee thanked Holly for attending the meeting and giving an informative update.

## **9/EP Surrey Police**

The Committee received a presentation from Borough Commander, Inspector Alick James, on Surrey Police's role during the COVID-19 pandemic and the general challenges of policing within the Surrey Heath Area.

Whilst residential burglaries and commercial burglaries had fallen by 39% and 24% within the last year respectively, theft of a motor vehicle and hate crime had risen in the past year by 14% and 27% respectively.

Motor vehicle thefts within Surrey Heath had centred in the wider Camberley Urban area, as well as in Lightwater and Chobham. The borough had experienced a notable rise in relay attacks which targeted cars with keyless entry and start systems. A relay attack typically involved two people working together. Whilst one perpetrator stood by the targeted vehicle, the other stood near the house with a device that would pick up a signal from the key fob. The device then relayed the

key fob's signal directly to the car, which allowed the thieves to get in and drive away immediately.

Owners of potential target cars could place their car keys in something which would block the key fob's wireless signal, such as Faraday or Radio-frequency identification (RFID) bag or metal travel mug. Furthermore car owners could also use a steering wheel lock to make the car a less attractive target.

Whilst hate crime within the borough had risen, the arrest rate and voluntary attendance rate had improved on previous years. 20% of hate crimes were between neighbours and 22% were between strangers, whilst the rest of cases were between known rivals or part of feuds. Surrey Police were emphasising the value of partnership intelligence in respect of hate crimes and were actively encouraging the reporting of witnessed hate crime cases, which could be used as evidence by police boards.

The Joint Neighbourhood Survey for Quarter 1 of 21/22 highlighted the stress the public paid to tackling issues such as anti-social or inconsiderate parking and anti-social driving. In relation to the car-meets which were taking place at the Meadows and Watchmoor Park; Surrey Police had secured a dispersal order at Watchmoor Park, which gave the Police powers to direct a person committing or likely to commit antisocial behaviour to leave Watchmoor Park for 48 hours. Positively the Joint Neighbourhood Survey stated that 90.2% of residents were confident or fairly confident in Surrey Heath neighbourhood team, which was the highest confidence rating in the County.

Surrey Police prioritised roads, where speeding offences were reported and where Surrey County Council had reported the highest speeding cases and casualties were most prevalent. This was outlined in its speed management plan. Such highest priority sites were provided with mobile enforcement and central casualty reduction officers from Surrey Police's Central Roads policing resources. Lower priority sites were policed by Surrey Police's local casualty reduction officer and by local resources.

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

- Dangerous, speeding and anti-social driving made up a significant proportion of complaints that Councillors received from residents.
- There had been large numbers of keyless vehicle thefts on the Copped Hall Estate in Parkside and Wellington Park in St Pauls. Whilst due to their inherently quick nature, it was difficult for the Police to respond to such thefts whilst they were taking place, the Roads Policing Team had the ability to tackle the issue by tools such as convoy analysis, comparative time analysis, and comparisons against stolen vehicle descriptions to identify suspects.
- There was an opportunity for Surrey Police to better promote its successes and promote the crime-prevention initiatives; such as use of a faraday pouch, which could be undertaken by residents; via their social media channels.
- Surrey Police's 'Meet the Beat', Initiative had been well received by residents. It was noted that the opportunity to meet with their Police

Community Support Officers (PCSOs) face to face had been reported to Councillors as of being of great reassurance.

- As it stood Surrey Heath Beat were intentionally overestablished for PCSOs, as some were due to leave to join as PCs or move to take up positions in different boroughs. Whilst 2 new PCSOs were due to shortly join the borough's force; there continued to be once PC vacancy; and a number of workload pressures which faced the borough's PCs.

The Committee thanked Inspector Alick James for his informative presentation and his continued positive work throughout the borough.

## **10/EP Surrey Heath Neighbourhood Watch**

Neighbourhood Watch was a grassroots charitable movement. It was the largest crime prevention voluntary movement in England and Wales and had upwards of 2.3 million members. Schemes were run by volunteers across England and Wales supported by volunteer Associations, and by Neighbourhood Watch Network, which was the national umbrella organisation for the movement.

Surrey Heath Neighbourhood Watch (SHNW) volunteers supported Surrey Heath beat to reduce crime and make Surrey Heath a safer place to live and work. A borough wide support group coordinated activity and disseminated information to each road/watch.

Watches regularly shared information, promoted good citizenship and aimed to encourage greater public participation to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour. The watch aimed to actively raise awareness of crime and crime patterns, such as cybercrime, text and telephone based scams as well as physical crimes such as burglary and anti-social behaviour.

During the pandemic Neighbourhood watch reconfigured its services to hold its watch meetings via Zoom, supported its watch coordinators by the phone, and joined the COVID champions scheme and distributed weekly updates and created an electronic newsletter.

Despite the pandemic, within the last year SHNW updated and refurbished all NHW street signs to a more contemporary design. Additional funds to support vulnerable people were raised in order to support vulnerable people by enhancing their home security via provisions such as new locks, alarms and CCTV. SHNW had also worked in greater partnership with Crimestoppers and had successfully applied to Your Fund Surrey for the funding of a Community Support Vehicle.

SHNW had worked in close partnership to support Surrey Police on a number of initiatives. SHNW had supported the Police and Crimestoppers with a catalytic converter theft awareness campaign at Longacres and had worked with PCSOs to set up new neighbourhood watches in high crime areas.

SHNW funded its activities from a significant grant from the Safer Surrey Heath Partnership and smaller grants from the fund of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and other bodies such as Windlesham Parish Council. Furthermore

SHNW raised some of funds from the sale of home security devices from the stalls at which it attended.

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

- There was an opportunity for SHNW to make use of Duke of Edinburgh Award participants in respect of volunteer activities.
- Members could opt to use their Surrey County Council Members' Community Allocation or Borough Ward Councillor community fund grant scheme funds to fund the activities of their local watches.
- Keyless entry car manufacturers were slowly transitioning to fobs which went into a sleep mode when placed down. However it was emphasised that there were multiple methods of entry, including key cloning which could have taken place before second-hand cars were bought.
- There was an opportunity for the Council and Ward Councillors to highlight the dangers of keyless car theft via their various social media channels.

## **11/EP Committee Work Programme**

The Committee considered its Work Programme for the remainder of the municipal year. The Committee were informed that a Surrey Heath Lottery Update Report would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee for noting.

Furthermore it was noted that Voluntary Support North Surrey, The Hope Hub, Camberley Alzheimer Café, Chobham Burymead Football Club and Bisley Village Hall would also present to the Committee during upcoming meetings. The Committee agreed that presentations from Camberley Judo Club and Surrey Search and Rescue would also be considered at future meetings. The Committee's intention to continue to receive presentations from Accent Housing at every meeting for the foreseeable future was reaffirmed.

Chairman