

Surrey Heath Borough Council
External Partnerships Select Committee
6 June 2023

Accent Housing

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 Officer
Wards Affected: **All / Multiple**

Summary and purpose

This report provides a short overview as to the External Partnerships Select Committee's prior consideration of Accent Housing.

Recommendation

The Committee is advised to RESOLVE that an all-Committee workshop is co-produced with Accent Housing to:

- i. Identify the causes of the poor performance of the maintenance and repairs service;
- ii. Explore Accent tenants' current customer service experience
- iii. Identify solutions and ways in which the Council can best support Accent.

1. Background and Supporting Information

- 1.1 Accent is a Housing Association which has provided homes and services for a diverse range of customers since 1966. The portfolio consists of 22,000 properties nationwide and provides a home to circa 35,000 people. Accent residents range from those taking their first step on the housing ladder, to those wishing for a solid base to bring up their family, or those needing a home that supports them to age well and live independently for longer.
- 1.2 Accent Housing have six independent living schemes within Surrey Heath: Derek Horn Court, Ballard Court, Meade Court, Cranmore Court, Heathermead Court, and Orchard Court. The above residences are known as 'courts', as they are available to couples or single people over the age of sixty. Living in a court offers elderly members of our community added support and security to live an independent lifestyle for as long as possible. Residents benefit from facilities and services such as secure door and emergency alarm system facilities; and specialist trained staff on hand.

- 1.3 Since February 2019, Accent Housing have frequently presented to the Select Committee after Members have received frequent reports and evidence exemplifying perceived poor performance of their maintenance service.
- 1.4 During previous scrutiny reviews, the Committee observed that Accent had previously experienced poor performance from its previous maintenance contractor Axis Europe. On 30 May 2022 Ian Williams were appointed as Accent's main repairs and maintenance contractor for its South Region. Whilst it was suggested that the maintenance backlog left by Axis Europe would take 6 months to clear during its presentation to the 29 November 2022 Committee meeting, Members observed that the amount of open maintenance orders had decreased from September 22.5%.
- 1.5 Despite this ongoing themes which have concerned the Committee have included the levels of customer service given to tenants in respect of maintenance and repair issues and the length of time cases are open and severity of outstanding legacy jobs.

2. Reasons for Recommendation

- 2.1 Whilst the Committee's previous scrutiny of Accent Housing may have been effective in highlighting some of the specific cases of Accent residents; there has been a lack of focus on identifying the root of the issues and making recommendations on how these can be addressed. There may also be opportunities to greater explore how the Council can provide additional support to Accent in areas.
- 2.2 It is also anticipated that a less formal workshop-style session may allow for greater understanding of some of the relevant topics and allow the development of better working in relations. It is anticipated that a report would be drawn together by Officers in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair summarising the findings of the workshop and any outcomes.

3. Proposal and Alternative Options

- 3.1 The Committee could choose to continue to scrutinise Accent in its current format at its formal Committee Meetings.

4. Contribution to the Council's Five Year Strategy

- 4.1 The scrutiny of Accent Housing covers various issues detailed in the Aspirations for our Community section in the Council's Five Year Strategy.

5. Resource Implications

- 5.1 It is anticipated that a small amount of officer time would be required to assist in the co-production and the running of the workshop.

6. Monitoring Officer Comments:

6.1 None

7. Environment and Climate Change

7.1 Even though it is not anticipated that it would be focus of the review, there maybe an opportunity to review the progress of the decarbonisation on Accent's housing stock.

Annexes

None

Background Papers

1. External Partnerships Select Committee Minutes – 11 February 2020
2. External Partnerships Select Committee Minutes – 1 December 2020
3. External Partnerships Select Committee Minutes – 7 September 2021
4. External Partnerships Select Committee Minutes – 30 November 2021
5. External Partnerships Select Committee Minutes – 1 March 2022
6. External Partnerships Select Committee Minutes – 7 June 2022
7. External Partnerships Select Committee Minutes – 6 September 2022