

**Surrey Heath Borough Council**  
**External Partnerships Select Committee**  
**12 March 2024**

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**Accent Workshop**

<b>Strategic Director/Head of Service</b>	Gavin Ramtohal
<b>Report Author:</b>	Eddie Scott- Senior Democratic Services Officer
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	Multiple

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**Summary and purpose**

This report provides a summary of the Committee's Accent Workshop which took place on 12 January 2024 at Camberley Theatre.

**Recommendation**

The Committee is advised to RESOLVE that

- (i) The summary of the workshop be noted;
- (ii) Any key points be drawn out, for Accent to include in their report/presentation to the Committee at the June 2024 Committee Meeting.

**1. Background and Supporting Information**

- 1.1 Following its consideration of Accent Housing at its meeting on 6 June 2023, the Committee resolved to co-produce a workshop to explore the performance of Accent's maintenance and repairs service and Accent tenants' current customer service experience; and to identify solutions and ways in which the Council can best support Accent.
- 1.2 Following the Committee Meeting, Committee Members were contacted via email to identify, who would be available and would like to take part in the Workshop. It was decided that Camberley Theatre would host the workshop in order to reframe the session, as one to have constructive, open dialogue out of the regular Committee setting.
- 1.3 The Workshop took place on the morning of 12 January 2024. The Workshop was attended by representatives of Accent Housing, its maintenance contractor: Ian Williams, Council Officers and Councillors Lisa Finan-Cooke, Shaun Garrett, Mary Glauert, Rob Lee, Lewis Mears and Murray Rowlands.

## **2. Performance and Customer Experience**

- 2.1 The Workshop found that the overall Accent customer experience offering was improving, which was highlighted by an 8% improvement in the perception metric in its annual tenant satisfaction survey. This improvement could be partially attributed to the roll-out of Mary Gober International customer service training throughout the organisation and the introduction of Accent's technical hub for maintenance-specific enquiries.
- 2.2 Despite this a disproportionate high volume of complaints received by Accent, were in relation to Surrey Heath properties. It was requested that there would be further investigation as to the reasons behind the disproportionate complaint rate- including consideration of age and comfort reporting of concerns amongst residents.
- 2.3 The Workshop identified that local performance monitoring tied in with a greater internal focus within Accent on systems improvement, including a switch of reporting functions to Power BI.

## **3. Performance of the Maintenance Service**

- 3.1 The Workshop noted that there had been a significant increase in repair cases nationally across housing associations. There was also a national shortage in Labour availability, which particularly affected the South East region. Whilst national Accent Key Performance Indicators showed that there was improvement which could be made to the maintenance service, first time fixes had been trending stronger following the implementation of the technical hub to better diagnose issues.
- 3.2 Ian Williams recently undertook various initiatives to build its local capacity. However, it was noted that 20% of work was subcontracted- for specialist works such as drainage and scaffolding. There were concerns from Councillors that poorly performing sub-contractors were not adequately identified and it was noted that the best quality subcontractors chose to take up lucrative contracts in London and that there was a feeling that poor performance of subcontractors had some damage to Accent's reputation locally.
- 3.3 Councillors had experienced that residents' experiences of Ian Williams operatives were good and Councillors were prompted to encourage residents to report any issues early. In addition "no access", rates were higher for Ian Williams in the South region than nationally, and there was a role for Councillors to encourage residents to be present for repairs.

## **4. Engagement Work and Improvements**

- 4.1 Members in attendance at the Workshop reported of a notable drop in constituents unhappy with the service they were receiving from Accent. There had also been a reported narrative shift in relation to Accent on local social media forums.

- 4.2 It was acknowledged that Members had a role to encourage Accent residents to proactively report maintenance issues; and that discretionary surveys conducted by Ian Williams had revealed Accent properties with damp and mould issues which hadn't been reported.
- 4.3 The Workshop felt that high quality community engagement work was already being led by Accent's new Community Development and Inclusion manager, which would lead to changed perceptions of Accent and that Accent were continuing to refine and identify the effectiveness of the delivery of its current customer service and the development of a customer plan. Councillors had a role to continue to encourage engagement between Accent and its customers, including during on-ground campaigns and via means such as distribution of Accent's local newsletters.

## **5. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 5.1 As it would be a year since Accent last attended a formal External Partnerships Select Committee meeting, it would be proportionate to invite their attendance at the first meeting of the municipal year.

## **6. Proposal and Alternative Options**

- 6.1 The Committee may decide to not include Accent Housing on its Work Programme for its meeting in June 2024.

## **7. Contribution to the Council Strategy**

- 7.1 The workshop was constructive in its approach throughout and exemplified Campaigning for Residents through the Building Strong Local Partnerships.

## **8. Resource Implications**

- 8.1 There are no resource implications arising from this report.

## **9. Section 151 Officer Comments:**

- 9.1 There are no financial implications relating to the report.

## **10. Monitoring Officer Comments:**

- 10.1 No Monitoring Officer Comments.

## **Annexes**

None

## **Background Papers**

None

