

COMMUNITY EXECUTIVE ADVISORY BOARD

4 April 2019

- * Councillor Adrian Chandler (Chairman)
- * Councillor Pauline Searle (Vice-Chairman)

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| * Councillor Alexandra Chesterfield | * Councillor Sheila Kirkland |
| * Councillor Angela Gunning | Councillor Bob McShee |
| Councillor Murray Grubb Jnr | Councillor Dennis Paul |
| * Councillor Christian Holliday | * Councillor Tony Phillips |
| * Councillor Nigel Kearse | Councillor Matthew Sarti |

* Present

Councillor Philip Brooker was also in attendance.

C29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Murray Grubb Jnr and Bob McShee.

C30 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary or non-pecuniary interests.

C31 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive Advisory Board held on 14 February 2019 were confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

C32 GUILDFORD HOME ADAPTATIONS AND IMPROVEMENT POLICY REVIEW - FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The Lead Councillor introduced a report which proposed a revised Private Sector Housing, Home Adaptation and Improvement Policy for Guildford that would allow the Council to extend the range of assistance available to vulnerable residents to assist them to remain living safely and independently in their own homes. Officers presented the report and delivered an accompanying presentation. The presentation summarised the Policy giving its context and provided recommendations and rationale in relation to discretionary policies, prevention grant, increasing the maximum grant, support for people in financial hardship and the relocation grant.

The policy had been written in response to increased funding, through the Better Care Fund, Housing Capital Grant. This was a combined fund provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department of Health to enable Councils to assist their residents to access housing improvements and adaptations, which would enable them to live independently at home, for as long as possible.

The changes in policy were also planned to implement recommendations made to Surrey Councils through Foundations (a national Home Improvement Agency charity) Adaptation and Equipment Report 2017. Each of the Surrey District and Borough Councils were working together, through the Surrey Equipment and Adaptations Project, to review, plan and implement the recommendations made within the Foundations report.

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The key features of the policy review were to introduce discretionary elements within the support provided through the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), to complement the mandatory provision. The discretionary policy would be available to all grant applicants, however, the Council anticipated it having a positive impact on approximately 90 people. The key changes were:

- Exemption from means testing for works that prevented falls, i.e. rails, ramps, steps and stairlifts;
- Introduction of a Prevention Grant to fund installation of rails and associated measures to prevent falls in the home without charge, in addition to works in the home to facilitate discharge from hospital, prevent ill-health and emergencies, such as minor repair or adaptations, assistive technology, emergency heating or electrical repairs, or clearing hoarding;
- Flexibility to the upper limit of DFG from £30,000 to £45,000 per application for major works. This additional funding would be means tested for adults and children with disabilities (the latter were exempt from means testing for works valued up to £30,000). The policy would allow more rapid decision making for complex cases, where funding was required from Surrey County Council funds, as well as from this Council;
- Discretion for the Regulatory Services Manager to waive means testing for those who would struggle financially to meet their contribution to the cost of works. The flexibility would have a maximum value of £12,000 for residents with financial hardship of income, or less than £24,500 savings. Any client contribution costing less than £1,000 would be waived;
- The introduction of Relocation Grant of up to £10,000 to assist home owners or tenants to move to a suitable property, when their current home was not suitable for adaptation; and
- To continue to provide discretionary assistance to applicants meeting the eligibility criteria in the current home improvement policy.

The report recommended that the Executive approved the revisions to the Home Adaptations and Improvement Policy for the reasons that the proposals: benefitted vulnerable residents and enabled them to remain living at home safely and in their own communities for as long as possible; made best use of increased Better Care Fund; met national best practice standards and the recommendations of Foundations Adaptations and Equipment Review 2017; had undergone thorough budget testing, were fully costed and would be regularly reviewed; and were supported by service user groups, Guildford Care and Repair Service and Surrey County Council Occupational Therapy teams who referred to the service.

The following points arose from related questions and discussion:

- The policy was publicised via methods including social media and relevant local organisations were made aware of it.
- The majority of referrals were via Adult Social Care and Health.
- As the cost to the NHS associated with falls etc. was considerable, removal of the means testing element was not significant cost wise. An initial surge in the number of applications owing to the absence of means testing was anticipated before subsequent levelling off.
- Spend was in the region of £500,000 to £550,000 per annum and as Government grant was £750,000 there was a carried forward underspend from 2017/18 and reserves.

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- It was possible to respond rapidly to make adaptations to prevent delayed hospital discharges. The time taken to formulate care packages was often the cause of such delays.
- There was an existing home improvement policy eligibility criteria since 2004 that properties should be in Council Tax Band E or below. Properties at the lower end of the housing market were targeted as it was likely that residents were unable to afford improvements. However, there was an exception policy.
- Building Regulations approval was often required and planning permission was also required in approximately 10 per cent of improvements where home extensions were included. The Council's surveyors obtained all necessary consents.
- There was a loan scheme for people who fell outside the means test. The social lender interest charge was 5 per cent and there were repayment options. Take up was two to three applications per annum.
- Replacing baths with showers and wet rooms was one of the most common adaptations. The installation of lifts was covered by the Policy although stairlifts were more usual.
- Reference was made to a previous task group which had focused on prevention.
- It was necessary for the Council to meet the Better Care Fund objectives. To date Surrey County Council had not sought the repayment of surplus grant although this could change in the future.

The Board indicated its support for the recommendation to the Executive that the revisions to the Home Adaptations and Improvement Policy be approved.

C33 PROCUREMENT UPDATE PRESENTATION

The Chairman read out a procurement update paper which advised that:

- Transformation of the Procurement service was underway since the recruitment of a permanent Procurement Manager in October 2018 and was ongoing.
- The Procurement Manager was working with the Future Guildford workstream to develop detailed proposals relating to the future model of procurement services.
- A Procurement Strategy had been drafted covering the period 2019-2021 and included key themes around Commissioning, Category Management and Contract Management. The Strategy would work closely with the Future Guildford workstream.
- The Corporate Management Team had approved the Terms of Reference of the Corporate Procurement Board and these had now been implemented, the Procurement Procedure Rules (PPR's) were currently being examined and updated.
- The Contracts Register continued to be a working document and had improved significantly. It was published to the Council's website on a quarterly basis in line with the Transparency Agenda.
- The Procurement function remained significantly under resourced and an exceptionally busy work area. Transformation work would continue with the addition of resources.
- Once more detailed proposals were developed around the agreed Procurement Strategy and suggested format of the future procurement team, they would be placed on the Work Programme and brought to the EAB for review and analysis.

In response to a query concerning the Transparency Agenda, the Board was advised that it was a national code that local authorities were obliged to comply with and share information with residents and businesses in respect of matters including spend and contractors. Further explanatory information would be provided to the Board. The update was noted.

C34 EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN

The expanded Executive Forward Plan was noted.

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C35 EAB WORK PROGRAMME

It was noted that a Procurement Update item would be added to the Work Programme.

C36 PROGRESS WITH ITEMS PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED BY THE EAB

As previously requested, the format of this summary report had been reviewed and improvements made as far as possible.

C37 THANKS

As this was the last meeting of the EAB before the Borough Election, the Chairman took the opportunity to thank the members of the Board, particularly the Vice-Chairman, officers and the Committee Officer for their contribution and support in recent years.

The meeting finished at 7.50 pm

Signed

Date

Chairman