

10 SEPTEMBER 2020

COMMUNITY EXECUTIVE ADVISORY BOARD

10 September 2020

- * Councillor Angela Goodwin (Chairman)
- * Councillor Ramsey Nagaty (Vice-Chairman)

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| * Councillor Paul Abbey | * Councillor Bob McShee |
| * Councillor Dennis Booth | * Councillor George Potter |
| * Councillor Andrew Gomm | * Councillor Jo Randall |
| Councillor Diana Jones | * Councillor Pauline Searle |
| * Councillor Ann McShee | * Councillor Fiona White |

* Present

Councillors Tony Rooth, Paul Spooner and James Steel were also in attendance.

C1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Diana Jones. There were no substitutes.

C2 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

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

C3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive Advisory Board held on 13 February 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at the earliest opportunity.

C4 INTRODUCING CHARGES FOR RAT AND MICE TREATMENTS

The EAB considered a report which presented the background to the existing pest control service provided by the Council and proposed options for the possible introduction of charging for rodent (rats and mice) treatments. The report invited the EAB to consider the options and make a recommendation to the Executive regarding charging in relation to rats and mice treatments to ensure the EAB's involvement in considering the options for future service provision.

The options proposed and considered in the report were:

- Option 1 - Continue to offer a contracted out Pest Control treatment service with free rodent treatments for all residents in the Borough.
- Option 2 - Continue to offer a contracted out Pest Control treatment service but introduce charges for rodents with concessions for users in receipt of qualifying benefits.
- Option 3 – Continue to offer a contracted out Pest Control treatment service but introduce charges for all pest control services including rodents without any concessions.
- Option 4 –Discontinue the pest control treatment service at the end of the current contract on 30 June 2021.

Officers recommended Option 2 as it delivered a saving whilst continuing to maintain support for residents in receipt of qualifying benefits. Option 4 which proposed the most significant

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change was also not discounted by officers as it delivered the most significant guaranteed saving. Option 2 was put forward as a saving from this service area as there was a need for the Council to make a number of financial savings as part of the Future Guildford programme. Possible future unitary authority status in Surrey had been proposed since the options had been developed and could also have financial implications for the service.

The following points arose from related questions, comments and discussion:

- Charging for rodent treatment services would not have a significant impact on the Council's General Fund budget as any saving would fall into the ring-fenced Housing Revenue Account, which had a deficit of approximately £2,500 in 2019/20 in relation to this service. Although the deficit had been higher in previous years according to service demand, this amount was not considered to warrant the introductions of fees.
- Any charging concessions for people living on low incomes in receipt of qualifying benefits should equate to 100% discount.
- The list of qualifying benefits needed to be updated to reflect the current situation.
- The qualification for a discount for people in receipt of State Retirement Pension was questioned as this related to the majority of people in time and clarification was sought.
- It was possible that the introduction of charges would dissuade some people from seeking rodent treatment services and this would exacerbate infestations and the associated health risks, particularly during the Coronavirus pandemic.
- The current contractor administered discounts for people in receipt of qualifying benefits.
- As the joint rodent treatment contract between Guildford, Woking and Surrey Heath Boroughs was due to expire in June 2021, it was suggested that, if the two other boroughs were in agreement, a 12 month extension of the contract could be sought in order to provide an opportunity to gather information to inform future service delivery in the light of possible unitary reorganisation in Surrey. A benchmarking exercise involving other Surrey boroughs / districts would also assist with decisions around future service provision and charging regimes. There would be cost and charging implications if Guildford Borough individually procured a service contract.

The EAB agreed the following recommendations for submission to the Executive:

- The decision regarding the rodent treatment contract be deferred pending the gathering of information regarding the financial implications of residents in receipt of benefits utilising the service, the likely cost of a new contract and the possible impact of the reorganisation of Surrey into one or more unitary authorities. If possible, the current contract should be extended for 12 twelve months whilst this information is collected and analysed to inform future contractual arrangements.
- In the meantime, the Council should continue with the EAB's preferred Option 1.
- In the event that the Executive does not support the continuation of Option 1, as an alternative, the EAB seeks the implementation of Option 2 amended to allow residents in receipt of qualifying benefits to receive the service free of charge. The list of qualifying benefits should be updated to ensure that it does not exclude anyone who would otherwise be entitled to receive the service free of charge.

C5 TENANCY STRATEGY CONSULTATION AND REVIEW

A report concerning the Tenancy Strategy consultation and review was before the EAB for consideration. The report explained that there was a legal requirement under the Localism Act 2011 for the Council to prepare and publish a tenancy strategy and to review that strategy periodically, which this report addressed. The strategy itself set the over-arching

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framework that social landlords operating in the Borough should have regard to in framing their individual tenancy policies.

Having originally published a tenancy strategy in 2013, the Council had now conducted the required review. The revised strategy set out how the Council and other social landlords (Registered Providers or housing associations) operating in Guildford would determine the type and length of tenancies to be offered to social tenants in the Borough.

The strategy must include everything that social housing landlords should consider when drawing up their own tenancy policies, including the:

- Different types of tenure to be offered;
- Circumstances under which these different types of tenancies would be granted;
- Where fixed term tenancies were granted, the lengths of those terms; and
- Circumstances in which a new tenancy would be given should any fixed-term tenancy expire.

The government regulator of social housing set the Tenancy Standard that required all social landlords to publish individual tenancy policies, which in turn determined tenancy types and tenancy lengths for new tenants and how they were reviewed on any expiry.

The purpose of the strategy was to set out the Council's approach to the use of flexible and other tenancies. It was intended to provide guidance to Registered Providers (housing associations), informing their policies and practices to ensure that they met housing need across the whole of the Borough. In addition, it would indicate to housing applicants what they could expect from a tenancy, flexible or otherwise, to:

- Make the best use of social housing stock;
- Meet local housing needs and prevent homelessness;
- Enable a range of tenure options in a more balanced housing market; and
- Promote sustainable communities.

The tenancy strategy also aimed to support the Council's wider aspirations and could assist in improving the focus on community needs, established through dialogue and consultation with local stakeholders and communities and delivered in partnership with other organisations. In addition, the tenancy strategy permitted the Council to offer flexible tenure in line with current housing need.

The Executive would be considering this matter at its meeting on 27 October 2020 and the EAB was invited to submit such comments to the Executive on the revised Tenancy Strategy as it thought appropriate.

The related Consultation Tenancy Review exercise had consisted of an on-line consultation on the Council's website and direct contact with Registered Providers operating in the Borough and other stakeholders such as the Guildford Tenants' Action Group. Responses to the consultation had been low key as the strategy was of a mundane and technical nature and viewed by consultees as a 'business as usual' management tool.

The EAB was advised of the number and type of tenancies amongst the Council's housing stock of approximately 5,200 properties. These consisted of 61 non-secure tenancies, 161 introductory tenancies, and 985 flexible tenancies issued since 2013. The remainder of the tenancies, in the region of 4,000 allowing for some voids, were secure tenure.

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The following points arose from related questions, comments and discussion:

- Although the reviewed strategy appeared to be acceptable and supported by a consultation process, the report was considered to be disappointingly unhelpful as it lacked sufficient information to inform councillors' views, such as a summary of consultation responses, an indication of changes being made compared to the last strategy and any amendments put forward as a result of the consultation responses. Inclusion of information relating to the number and type of tenancies would be helpful.
- In terms of consultation, this had focused on Registered Providers. Although the Tenants' Action Group had been consulted directly as it was engaged in technical aspects of tenancies, it did not submit a response. Not all tenants had been contacted as there was a balance to be reached between expending the resources required to write to all tenants and the likely level of response to a technical strategy that was unlikely to change due to legislation.
- There were concerns regarding the principle of the strategy in relation to non-secure and flexible tenancies and it was acknowledged that the five year flexible tenancies could lead to tenants exercising their right to buy option at the expiry of their tenancy leading to a reduction in the amount of social housing. However, the tenants of 4,000 of the Council's properties benefited from secure tenancies.
- The solution to a shortage of social housing was to increase the provision to meet need.
- The creation of a single page information factsheet, possibly including case studies, which could be viewed on-line or printed was a means of engaging and informing tenants and potential tenants in respect of the strategy and tenancies. The Council's Communications Team could assist in this area.
- In view of the possibility of Surrey being restructured into one or more unitary authorities, consistency in providing tenant support and information across the county was sought.
- The Council's Housing Section undertook commendable work including assisting and supporting tenants and potential tenants. It would be interesting to explore how this support could be enhanced, particularly for vulnerable and homeless people.

The EAB made the following recommendations to the Executive:

- A single page information factsheet, possibly including case studies, be created with the assistance of the Council's Communications Team for viewing on-line or printing from the Council's website as a means of engaging and informing tenants and potential tenants regarding the Tenancy Strategy and tenancy conditions.
- A summary document to accompany reports such as the Tenancy Strategy providing consultation responses and proposed changes stemming from those responses be provided in future to inform councillors' considerations and recommendations.
- The delivery of additional social housing to meet local need be pursued to provide homes for people currently on the Council's housing waiting list.

C6 EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN

The EAB was advised that the report of the Review of EABs, which included the comments made by the Joint EAB at its meeting held on 9 July 2020, would be considered by the Executive and the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee before being submitted to full Council on 6 October 2020 for determination.

As the Guildford Economic Regeneration item, which was scheduled to be considered by the Executive on 5 January 2021, was likely to impact on the remits of both the Place-making and Innovation and Community EABs, it was suggested that it may be appropriate for the

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matter to be considered by the Joint EAB in advance of the Executive. This proposal would be considered by the Executive Advisory Board / Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme meeting on 11 September 2020.

Councillors were invited to submit any other suggestions for the referral of Executive Forward Plan items to the EAB for consideration to the Chairman or Vice-Chairman.

C7 EAB WORK PROGRAMME

The suggestion that Sutherland Memorial Park be added to the unscheduled list of the EAB's work programme to enable members to take a holistic view of the new tenancies and other changes at the Park, possibly in conjunction with the forthcoming Sutherland Memorial Park Strategy, would also be considered by the Executive Advisory Board / Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme meeting on 11 September 2020.

The meeting finished at 8.30 pm

Signed

Date

Chairman

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