

Keith Witham's Member's Question – response

8.6.2023

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Member's Question from Keith Witham:

Would the Adults and Health Select Committee please consider an investigation into the events and circumstances of "Greenways", Ash Road, Worplesdon to establish why SCC public funds are being used to knowingly enable a provider who is in breach of planning and licencing regulations?

Due to the severity of the allegations will the Cabinet Member agree to instruct withdrawal of financing from this facility pending the results of the investigation?

Context/background to question:

For the Select Committee, ASC is aware that residents of Ash Road are very concerned regarding the use of the premises "Greenways" by Applenet Care and Support to house ex-offenders with mental health needs, financed by SCC Adult Social Care despite the provider NOT having planning consent from the local authority for that use, and NOT being licenced by the local authority as an HMO (House of Multiple Occupation). SCC Adult Social Care are knowingly using public money to enable a provider in breach of planning regulations. This cannot be a sustainable position.

Fox Corner is a small rural residential area, part of the parish of Pirbright, located in between Guildford and Woking. It is an isolated area with little bus service, and miles from community facilities, food shops or any employment opportunities in either Woking or Guildford.

Requests from nearby residents that ASC Officers also speak directly to local residents to understand the impact the unlicenced use of the property is having on the local community and to cross check / validate what they are told by Applenet have been ignored.

SCC ASC is aware that there is no planning permission in place for:

- The use of Greenways as a residential care facility
- The use of Greenways as an HMO (for which planning is required when occupied by more than 5 people which is currently the case – and is Applenet's plan)
- The use of the garage for residential purposes, for which it has and is being used.

Would the Cabinet Member agree that SCC has a duty to uphold rules and regulations – especially when dealing with matters of public safety, and as such must immediately stop spending taxpayers' money on Greenways until all licensing and planning issues are resolved.

Response:

As a note of clarification, Greenways is a supported independent living scheme and not a residential care facility. The key distinction between these two types of services is that a supported independent living scheme is not registered with the Care Quality Commission. Supported independent living schemes do not require any specific planning permission.

Police attendance:

Police have been in attendance at the service on five occasions to date in 2023.

19/02/2023: Surrey Police came to check up on a tenant, as he texted them that he is feeling low. They had a chat with him and left. No further action taken.

27/02/2023: The Police came to arrest a tenant regarding an arson allegation. Police investigation is still pending. This tenant has now moved to another house.

15/03/2023: A tenant was arrested at the house for breaking his license conditions and was recalled. The tenant is now in Hospital.

11/05/2023: A parent of a tenant called the police and reported that her daughter was being verbally abused. Police arrived and had discussions with the family and Applenet Management. They also spoke to another tenant regarding the incident.

01/06/2023: The police came back as a follow up to the 11/5/2023 incident and spoke to the tenant and the management again. Case now closed.

Actions taken and planned:

The County Council have taken a number of steps in response to the concerns raised as set out above. The Head of Integrated Commissioning and the Chief Operating Officer visited the scheme in Early May 2023 following initial receipt of the concerns.

The Lead Mental Health commissioning manager for Greenways has met with the provider a number of times to discuss the concerns raised and ensure appropriate measures are in place. This with regard to the safety and welfare of the tenants of Greenways and with regard to ensuring that disturbance levels are minimised.

Adult Social Care mental health commissioners will continue to liaise with the provider and Guildford Borough Council to ensure that measures are in place to ensure the scheme is run appropriately in the context of the needs of the clients, HMO regulations and the setting of the service.

Adult Social Care will liaise with Guildford police to consult on their position with regard to Greenways.

Social Care Practitioners will continue to work closely with the provider and other professionals to ensure anyone moving to Greenways is suitable in terms of their support needs.

Social Care Practitioners will continue to monitor the stability and progress of their clients living at Greenways. Where it is assessed that people cannot be supported appropriately at Greenways, they will be supported to move on.

Quality assurance:

The Quality Assurance Lead for adult social care carried out a monitoring visit to the service on 2.6.2023. A summary of observations and information gathered is summarised below:

- When the scheme opened in 2019 there was a period where some of the tenants' needs were too high for the scheme. These tenants were moved on and since then admissions have been carefully managed.
- The provider has taken a range of measures in order to ensure the service is stable and that people in the surrounding areas are not disturbed.
- Support plans and risk assessments were in good order. We observed tenants going about their daily lives and returning from activities in the community.
- Tenants we met gave very positive feedback about their experience living at Greenways, telling us how they had improved their independent living skills and increased their confidence in their time there.
- The scheme appeared to be stable and well run. Professionals we spoke to were very complimentary about the service. There was a sufficient level of staffing for the tenants that were there during the day and night-time.
- The scheme has a 1 year licence to operate as a House of Multiple Occupation. This was issued by Guildford Borough Council in April 2023 following a compliance inspection. A two week follow up inspection was made to check on some minor recommendations. The Borough Council is liaising with Surrey County Council with regard to the nature of the service in consideration of a 4 year extension.
- The provider was able to demonstrate that they had a proactive approach to engaging with health and social care professionals to ensure tenant's needs were met in a timely way.

Conclusion and response:

In light of the positive engagement with the provider; the assurance regarding the quality of the service delivery and outcomes being achieved for tenants, Surrey County Council does not consider that it would be appropriate, proportionate or reasonable to cease funding for Greenways at this point.

Surrey County Council will continue to work closely with the provider and all relevant agencies to ensure the scheme is being run appropriately.

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