
DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

17 APRIL 2013

Present -

MEMBERS:

Councillor H Chapman (Mayor); Councillors, Adeleke, Adshead, Anderson, Mrs Bassadone, Bhinder, Clark, Collins, Conway, Doole, Douris, Elliot, Fantham, Flint, Mrs Green, Griffiths, Mrs Guest, Harden, Harris, Hearn, N Hollinghurst, R Hollinghurst, Laws, Lawson, Link, Macdonald, Mahmood, Marshall, McLean, Organ, Peter, Mrs Rance, Reay, Ryan, G Sutton, R Sutton, Taylor, Tiley, Tindall, White, Whitman, Williams, Wood, C Wyatt-Lowe and W Wyatt-Lowe (45).

OFFICERS:

The Chief Executive, The Corporate Director (Finance & Governance), The Corporate Director (Housing & Regeneration), The Corporate Director (Performance, Improvement and Transformation), The Assistant Director (Legal Democratic & Regulatory), The Group Manager (Democratic Services), L Collins and P Duff.

The meeting began at 7.30pm.

50. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2013 were agreed by the Members present and were then signed by the Mayor.

51. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

52. ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. By the Mayor

- The Mayor announced the deaths of former Councillors John Lythgoe and Elio Gomez; and the former Prime Minister Baroness Margaret Thatcher, whose funeral took place today, and held a one minute silence in remembrance of them.

Councillor Mrs Flint left the chamber during the one minute silence.

- The Mayor asked Members who had not been able to exchange their ID badges and access fobs to contact Member Support.

Chairman:

2. By Chief Executive

The Chief Executive advised that the Liberal Democrat, Ron Tindall, was duly elected as ward member for the Adeyfield West constituency at the by election held on 21 March 2013.

3. By the Group Leaders and members:

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Ayling, Mrs G Chapman, McKay and Townsend.

Councillors Bateman and Wixted were absent.

4. Members of the Cabinet:

Councillor Williams, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Community Leadership

The Leader did not make a report at this time but he offered to take questions.

Councillor Adeleke expressed concern that Councillor Flint had walked out during the two minute silence held for the two ex-councillors, as well as for Mrs Thatcher.

Councillor Harden, Portfolio Holder for Residents and Regulatory Services

Environmental Health & Legal Governance

Teams were successful in prosecuting a Tring convenience store owner on three offences relating to food safety due to a rat infestation. One for not having adequate controls for pests and two for putting food on sale that was unfit for human consumption. The defendant was fined £8000 and ordered to pay our full costs of bringing the case to trial.

Member Development

The target for 2012/13 was for each Councillor to attend three training sessions throughout the year. I am pleased to say that the outcome was over four. We held thirteen evening sessions and we were notified of five courses that individual councillors had attended. Can I thank the councillors who did attend and I am sure you will agree there have been some great sessions this year. We need to maintain this positive attendance record for the coming year.

Verge Hardening Project

This is progressing with the first consultations completed. Successful areas that do not require planning permission will see work commencing on them at the end of May; the areas named will be Ritcroft Street, The Thistles & Hilldown Road.

Youth Democracy

- ◆ Sixty nine students from six schools across Dacorum came to our Film making induction workshop.

Chairman:

The aim was to raise awareness among young people about local democracy and the importance of voting through the use of creative arts and media. Twenty students returned to the Council Chamber in March for the screening of the films created by them for the 'animated about voting' film making competition.

Nine films were received from five schools. The films can be viewed on the DBC YouTube channel.

- ◆ The Mayor & Mike Penning, MP, attended the event to present the certificates and an award to the top 3 film makers. Rudolf Steiner School won the competition with their video 'The pathway to democracy'.

Regarding verge hardening, Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said that she was delighted at the 3 nominated sites mentioned and asked if there had been a decision made on the rest of the sites.

Councillor Harden confirmed that they were currently in the planning process and they would come available on line after a decision had been made.

Councillor Rance referred to the three sites in Tring and asked if any of the Ward Councillors had been notified of the proposed planning applications.

Councillor Harden confirmed that all Ward Councillors would be notified.

Councillor N Hollinghurst was pleased the scheme had started as the wet weather meant that some of the Council's property had been badly damaged by on street parking. Councillor Hollinghurst asked if the scheme could be accelerated and include some of the Council's assets.

Councillor Harden said the main purpose of the programme is to increase parking provision in areas that need it. If there was any budget left over that could be used to put enforcement in place, e.g. posts.

Councillor Griffiths asked the Portfolio Holder to thank officers for listening to the residents in Ritcroft Street regarding verge hardening and asked if officers will be keeping residents up to date with future changes

Councillor Harden replied that all residents in Ritcroft Street had been consulted.

Councillor Harris referred to the 1st pilot that had been carried out in Highfield and said that lessons could be learned from the scheme in place. Councillor Harris asked the Portfolio Holder to pass on to officers the fact that a third attempt was being made to fix the problems.

Councillor Harden said he was well aware of the situation and lessons had been learned. The original scheme was run by Hertfordshire County Council. Dacorum Borough Council was carrying out improved verge hardening.

Councillor Flint asked if, once a scheme was in place, posts would be looked at as she had some concerns regarding Plantation Walk where there were a lot of bungalows.

Councillor Harden said that the idea was for parking provision only but would pass on her concerns to Officers.

Chairman:

Councillor Mrs Laws, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Sustainability

Dacorum Borough Council, as part of the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership, helped local schools dispose of their old and unwanted electrical equipment by arranging to collect them for free and have them recycled.

16 schools took part in the Borough and 725 computers and other electrical items have been recycled as part of a county-wide project. 88 other schools throughout Hertfordshire got on board too, with a total of 3,568 items of electrical equipment being collected in three days.

Clean Safe and Green teams are currently re-landscaping the Doolittle roundabout in Apsley which should be finished by the end of this week.

Clean Safe and Green have started their Summer Working Programme of grass cutting etc.

The recycling team organised a Nappuccino morning for Real Nappy Week this week to promote the environmental and financial benefits of using real nappies. A Real Nappy Advisor demonstrated the ease of using real nappies and displayed the variety of trendy nappies that can be loaned from her library. Also parents learned about our £50 reward scheme for using real nappies which is a county-wide WasteAware initiative.

Councillor N Hollinghurst asked if the Portfolio Holder would accept his appreciation for the development of the children's play area of Miswell Lane in Tring. Councillor N Hollinghurst said he also appreciated the efforts being made by WasteAware and in local schools.

Councillor Laws said the Miswell Lane play area and the other eight sites had been a huge success and accepted those thanks with pleasure.

Councillor Taylor asked the Portfolio Holder to pass on his personal thanks regarding the way the borough is looking with the hedging and ditching that has been undertaken.

Councillor Laws thanked Councillor Taylor and said she would pass his comments on with pleasure.

Councillor Tiley, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources

Members may recall that in mid 2009 our Benefits Service was put into "an improvement" plan on the guidance of the Audit Commission and Cabinet in June and November 2009 accepted and monitored and agreed the improvement plan. It is with some pride and relief that I can now report to you that this service is now in good health and robust despite all the recent government changes and in March they have:

- Converted all CTB claims to our new Council Tax Support scheme.
- Implemented the changes to exemptions and discounts;
- Implemented the social size criteria;
- Outsourced all of our printing and inserting to CFH – which will deliver savings on printing and postage;

Chairman:

- Introduced our Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support summary letter – making decision notices easier to understand for customers and hopefully preventing avoidable contact;
- Introduced the matching of Council Tax Bills and Council Tax Support letters – which will save on postage and make things clearer for our customers;
- Implemented Gandlake/Laserserve – allowing us to tailor print files to include inserts and direct debit instructions so making the process more efficient and giving us more flexibility;
- Moved to on-line leaflets and created a two side A4 leaflet which communicates information on how Council Tax is spent in an attractive easily understandable way;
- Completed a “paperless” annual billing and uprating process – all of our reports are electronic, our proofs from the printers are electronic and all of our reconciliation documentation is electronic;
- Trained all our staff and staff from other services on all the changes that we have coming in from April;
- Created our “task force” so we are able to provide a holistic response to our customers when they receive their bills and letters and want more information.

Two Group Managers, Louise Freeth and Nicola Ellis, deserve recognition for leading this transformation but two Team Leaders under them have provided a constant support – Chris Baker and Anna Elliott. They deserve our warm congratulations and thanks as do all who work in this area. I am delighted to announce that Chris Baker has been appointed to take over from Nicola Ellis. A home-grown winner.

Councillor N Hollinghurst said that he was pleased to hear of the recent changes in the software and equipment being used and highlighted that it is important to have the correct equipment. He asked the Portfolio Holder if he was confident that there had been sufficient training in Revenue and Benefits to enable the staff to deal with queries in a more timely manner and if they were capable in responding to queries regarding housing issues such as down-sizing accommodation.

Councillor Tiley said that he had every confidence that there had been sufficient training involved and felt staff could cope with complex queries raised. He mentioned that there is a task force that has been put together to address any future problems that may arise for constituents.

Some of the government rules were still being promulgated and there is a conflict between information as the Council understood it and new guidance. Sometimes information has to be checked with the Legal Team to ensure up to date information is given to benefit claimants. With so many changes a few cases may well drop through the net and Councillor Tiley asked councillors to involve himself, Chris Baker and the Task Force if he felt people were being caused concern and worry.

Councillor Harris, as Chariman of Highfield Neighbourhood Action, was trying to get a youth club in Highfield and asked if the Portfolio Holder could help by retaining some money from the budget. Negotiations were being held with Hertfordshire County Council regarding land and there was a building available. Councillor Harris did not want the project spoilt because of lack of reserves. `J Guiton was leading the project.

Councillor Tiley said he would take the comments made on board and would meet with the Corporate Director (Finance and Governance) for an update on that budget. This money had been allocated to different projects at different times and different

Chairman:

community groups felt it was earmarked for them. Councillor Tiley agreed to give Councillor Harris an answer after enquiries had been made.

Councillor Douris, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration

Very quietly and with no fanfare early in March a pen was put to paper and a contract signed which heralded the start of the process which will see the start of the rejuvenation of the Town Centre in Hemel Hempstead. It was the land deal between Dacorum Borough Council, Morrisons and the college, upon which at the end of the Marlowes will see a new state of the art College and a new modern Morrisons food store. I am advised that detailed plans will be submitted to the Council this summer with this £25 million investment creating new educational and training facilities at the college and bringing around 350 new jobs to the town at Morrisons.

Now everyone can see what is being proposed either by going to the dedicated website www.thelinkhemel.com which will be regularly updated or by visiting the public exhibition between 2pm – 7pm on Friday 26th April at the library at the college or in the Marlowes shopping centre on Saturday 27th April between 9am – 5.30pm.

I am genuinely excited at this step, especially as later this month the Council will be taking the initial steps towards the procurement and securing of a developer partner for the Public Service Quarter, which will provide a new civic focal point for the town centre through providing a new library, smaller and more modern and energy efficient offices for the Borough Council and accommodation for some of the Council's voluntary sector partners.

It is my intention to bring to the Cabinet on 30th April a paper to consider arrangements for dealing with a new bus interchange and development of the Market Square. This will set the scene for the development of the existing Market Square and bus station.

I am pleased to report that a successful inaugural meeting of the Friends of the Water Gardens was held late in March and I am confident that this group will grow and contribute much to our Heritage Lottery Fund bid for the regeneration of Jellicoe's great creation.

I am pleased to report that work on developing the borough's potential for attracting tourism is progressing well. With our new Tourism Officer now in place, I hosted the first meeting of the Dacorum Tourism Partnership at a launch event at Berkhamsted Golf Club last month. In addition to getting local businesses and organisations involved in the partnership, we are developing a suite of information for the Dacorum: Look No Further website (www.dacorumlooknofurther.co.uk), including video clips to showcase some of the key attractions in Dacorum.

I can confirm that a robust response was submitted by this council to the Luton Airport consultation and also a further response on behalf of relevant HIPP members.

Today, I have attended a meeting relating to the Heath Park regeneration scheme.

Finally, I am pleased to see that the daffodils have bloomed at the Phoenix roundabout making a welcome splash of colour as you arrive into Hemel Hempstead.

Councillor R Hollinghurst said she was delighted that at last the centre of Hemel Hempstead was being regenerated and refurbished. Councillor R Hollinghurst asked Councillor Douris, in light of Tesco cancelling all future large store projects, if he was sufficiently confident that Morrisons would carry with this project.

Chairman:

Councillor Douris said he had not heard the report regarding Tesco. Morrisons were not in the same situation as Tesco and Councillor Douris said he was convinced that Morrisons were going ahead with this. Morrisons and the college were preparing their plans and had already spent a significant amount of money on initial work to get to this stage. Morrisons would be a great addition to the town bringing a competitive edge to the supermarkets already here.

Councillor N Hollinghurst was pleased to hear the Council was putting more effort into tourism and asked Councillor Douris if he was aware that Tring Town Council maintains an information office that is open to the public for a far greater amount of hours than Victoria Hall and if he would be contacting the Town Clerk as Councillor N Hollinghurst was sure Tring Town Council would like to play its role to stimulate tourism and put this asset at the project's disposal.

Councillor Douris said Tring was a very delightful town. The Tourism Officer was bringing great energy to the borough's tourism offer and would be asked to make contact with the relevant people at Tring.

Councillor Griffiths, Portfolio Holder for Housing

Tenant & Leaseholder Services

A new type of tenancy agreement for tenants of Dacorum Borough Council was launched on 2 April 2013. A Flexible Tenancy Agreement will only be issued to tenants of general needs accommodation who are not transferring from another Council owned home.

Our Strategic Tenancy Policy, agreed by Cabinet in January, commits the authority to using these agreements to enable the Council to make best use of its stock.

April sees the end of the 'You Are the Key' campaign designed to recruit more tenants to get involved with the Housing Service. Legislation such as the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 and the Localism Act 2012 requires landlords to support tenants to enable them to 'co-regulate' the activities of their landlord. The Localism Act 2012 also enables a panel of tenants to play a statutory role in arbitrating between the landlord and an aggrieved tenant as part of the complaints process.

April sees the introduction of a number of welfare benefit changes which could have a potential impact on the rent collection performance of the Housing Service. The Welfare Benefit Taskforce, combining staff from the Housing Service and Revenues and Benefits, will continue to run until the end of April designed to support people through and mitigate the impact of the changes on household incomes. The Income Team is working on a number of other initiatives which are also designed to help tenants affected by the changes and by further changes to come.

Property and Place

Procurement Project Update

The Procurement project is progressing well, with the Pre-Qualification Questionnaires evaluated for both the Gas Servicing and Installation and the Total Asset Management contracts. There was a good level of interest from the market, which was very positive and demonstrated the benefit of the early engagement that was undertaken during the soft market testing exercise.

Chairman:

Five contractors have been shortlisted and invited to submit tenders for the Gas Servicing and Installation contract. The incumbent contractor has not been shortlisted and the Council is working closely with them to ensure the transition is managed effectively and the compliance figures remain high.

The validation of the Total Asset Management Pre-Qualification Questionnaires is currently being undertaken and the shortlisted candidates will be invited to participate in dialogue once this process has been completed.

The tender is being prepared for the consultancy and professional services support that will be required to undertake those services, which are not provided in-house and to support the management and on-going commercial evaluation of the new financial arrangements once the new contracts have been awarded.

The procurement of the Mechanical and Electrical specialist contracts will be commenced later in the year, as the main contracts run until 2015 and this will enable sufficient resource to be invested in completing the Competitive Dialogue and ensuring the transition to the new contracts is managed effectively.

Strategic Housing

The Council New Build programme is on track with the site at Galley Hill being hoarded early next week. There is a report going to April Cabinet setting out the HRA Business Plan for 2013/14 which includes information on phases 2 & 3 of the Council New Build programme which includes a further 200 new council homes for rent.

Councillor Mrs Rance referred to page 27 of the agenda, 7.2 Housing Allocations Policy, and expressed concern regarding Council being asked to approve the amended draft policy document. Councillor Mrs Rance asked for confirmation that the draft policy, including minor amendments, had been reviewed by the Council's legal service.

Councillor Griffiths said the recommendation is to recommend a draft policy. When it has been approved by the solicitor it will go back to the Corporate Director (Housing and Regeneration), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing. Any minor amendments would be approved by the Corporate Director (Housing and Regeneration) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing. Any major amendments would need to go back to Council.

Councillor Mrs Rance was still concerned that Council was being asked to recommend something that has not yet been checked by the Legal Team. Councillor Mrs Rance accepted it will come back if there were large amendments but it seems a waste of time.

Councillor Mrs Griffiths said it was a time issue. Consultation finished two weeks ago. The next Council meeting is in July and the policy was meant to be in place now. Any major amendment would have to come back to Council.

The Assistant Director (Legal, Democratic and Regulatory) understood it was a timing issue. The Legal Service did not anticipate there being any problems or need to make any great changes to the policy but just required to see the final version.

Councillor Harris asked what the delay was in getting the policy to this stage and who decides what was a minor or a major amendment.

Chairman:

Councillor Griffiths said it was a rush because the Council was waiting for guidance about new laws and there was a lot of outside information to take into consideration. Statutory consultation took place. Regarding minor and major amendments, legal advice would be taken on that.

Councillor Marshall asked the Portfolio Holder to email all members details of all changes that were made to the policy and if they were minor or major.

Councillor Griffiths said this would be part of the decision making process.

53. QUESTIONS

There were no questions

54 BUSINESS FROM THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING

There was no business from the last Council meeting.

55. CABINET REFERRALS

The referrals from Cabinet on 26 March 2013 were submitted. It was moved by Councillor Williams, duly seconded and

Resolved:

That the following be approved:

26 March 2013

55.1 AUTHORISATION OF VIREMENT (CA/039/13)

A supplementary estimate for additional ICT support in 2013/14 of £102,000 to be funded from the Technology Reserve.

55.2 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY (CA/044/13)

The amended draft policy document.

55.3 TOP TIER REVIEW (CA/047/13)

1. The Chief Executive's request to take early retirement on the grounds of the efficiency of the service.
2. That the post of Chief Executive be retained.
3.
 - a) The reduction of the Top Tier Chief Officer Structure to three posts by the deletion of a Corporate Director post.
 - b) To convene the Council's Appointments Committee and to commence the recruitment process for a new Chief Executive, restricted in the first instance to inviting applications for the post from the three internal Corporate Directors only.
 - c) In the event that the Appointments Committee is unable to recommend to Council the appointment of an internal Corporate

Chairman:

Director as Chief Executive to immediately make arrangements for the post to be advertised externally and undertake a fresh recruitment process.

- d) To delegate to the Leader of the Council-
 - (i) the authority to approve the appointment of such external advisors as he thinks appropriate for the purpose of providing expert and independent advice and support to the Appointments Committee in the recruitment process and in the design and conduct of a candidates' assessment centre; and
 - (ii) in exercise of the delegated power in (i) above, the authority to waive the Council's Procurement Standing Orders insofar as they relate to the appointment of consultants for the purposes of expediency.

Councillor Williams said Council was being asked to approve retention of the post of the Chief Executive and ring fence applications for the post from the three internal Corporate Directors. If that process was not successful, the post would be immediately advertised externally to recruit in the normal way. Since those recommendations had been made, some comments had been received from other councillors.

Ring fencing does not mean the Council is looking for an easier option. An internal appointment would be as robust as an external one. The three directors had been written to asking them to submit an application for the post if they wished and outlining the process. The external process has been agreed.

If the Appointments Committee make a recommendation to Council, that will go to Council on 15 May. This will give the new post holder time to assimilate with the existing Chief Executive. The move from four to three in the top tier will require a realignment of responsibilities from the existing three directorates. The responsibility for the realignment will rest with the new post holder and discussions would take place. The Council was not ruling out a shared service model but was ruling out sharing the Chief Executive with another authority.

Councillor Williams believed the best way for the authority to achieve savings is to following the recommendations as laid out to Council.

55.4 PENSION POLICY (CA/048/13)

The Pension Policy to be lodged with the Council's Pension Administrator.

56. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REFERRALS

There were no Overview and Scrutiny Referrals.

Chairman:

57. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES REVIEW 2012/13

The Chairman of the Finance & Resources and Health in Dacorum Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor G Sutton introduced the Reviews and highlighted certain aspects of the work carried out by the individual committees:

Strategic Planning & Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee - Chairman - Councillor Anderson

- Topics included the Clean, Safe and Green service, Waster Services, Affordable Housing, Maylands Gateway, Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Masterplan and the Parking Service as well as many other topics throughout the year, all with one aim, at making Dacorum a clean, prosperous and pleasant place to live and work in. It was highlighted that a recent survey put Hemel Hempstead high on a list of great places to live in.

Finance & Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Chairman – Councillor G Sutton

- This Committee has dealt with in depth scrutiny of Performance Reports, Revenue Outturn Reports, Risk Management Reports etc. We were also able to deal with our “Draft Tender” Report on the Hemel Hempstead Street Market, as well as Sportspaces’ Financial Report.

Housing & Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Chairman – Councillor Marshall

- As usual, as you would expect, this Committee has had one of the **busiest** agendas to cope with. The key topics, covered Housing including Sheltered Housing and reports and presentations from Sportspace Youth Connexions and many others.
- All three OSC’s debated, jointly and in their separate committees, the 2013-14 budget proposals. Full and in depth discussions took place during this process and I feel we must offer sincere thanks to all of the officers concerned in this process for ensuring that we had full and accurate data on which we were able to base our decisions.

Health in Dacorum – Chairman – Councillor Sutton

- During the year we have debated many aspects of Local Health Service Provision, including the Local GP Surgery Satisfaction Survey Report as well as considering issues such as the Hertfordshire Health & Wellbeing Strategy. Health and Social Care Commissioning, and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. For the first time this year we introduced an opportunity for Councillors to raise local health concerns and issues within their wards. This is ongoing so if any Members have any issues to contact Member Support or just come along to one of the meetings.

Councillor Sutton thanked the Chairman and committee members of the Overview and Scrutiny committees and officers for their input and commitment throughout the year.

Chairman:

58. CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

It was moved by Councillor Williams, duly seconded and

Resolved:

1. That Councillor Macdonald becomes a member of the Development Control Committee, replacing Councillor Mrs Green.
2. That Councillor Adshead becomes a substitute for the Development Control Committee.
3. That Councillor Reay becomes a member of the Appointments Committee, replacing former Councillor Lloyd.
4. That Councillor Ayling becomes a member of the Standards Committee, replacing former Councillor Lloyd.

Councillor Mrs Rance said she would not be making any changes in membership prior to Annual Council once the results of the Watling by-election were available.

The meeting ended at 8.25 pm.

Chairman: