
DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

16 JANUARY 2019

Present:

MEMBERS:

Councillor Williams (Leader) Councillors, Adeleke, G Adshead, Anderson, Armytage, Banks, Mrs Bassadone, Bhinder, Birnie, Brown, Herbert Chapman, D Collins, Conway, Douris, Elliot, England, Fisher, Griffiths, Guest, Harden, P Hearn, Imarni, Link, Maddern, Mahmood, Marshall, Matthews, Mills, Peter, Pringle, Ransley, Riddick, Ritchie, Silwal, G Sutton, R Sutton, Taylor, Timmis, Tindall, C Wyatt-Lowe and W Wyatt-Lowe

OFFICERS:

Corporate Director - Finance and Operations, Elections Team Leader, Legal Governance Team Leader, Corporate Director - Housing & Regeneration and Chief Executive

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2018 were agreed by the Members present and then signed by the Mayor.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

4 ANNOUNCEMENTS

4.1 By the Mayor:

None.

4.2 By the Chief Executive:

None.

4.3 By the Group Leaders:

Councillor Williams confirmed that apologies had been received from Councillors Barrett, Clark, Hicks, Howard, Mclean and SHearn.

Councillor Fisher offered apologies for Cllr Fethney

Councillors Whitman, Bateman and E Collins were not present.

Councillor Guest joined the meeting at 7.50pm.

4.4 Council Leader and Members of the Cabinet:

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

Cllr Williams gave an update on the SW Herts Leaders meetings which have been taking place fortnightly to look at planning issues across SW Herts area. This has been primarily focused around infrastructure and other issues that result from the plans that span across our districts and where those issues arise as people travel across SW Herts and broader Hertfordshire area. Cllr Williams advised that they are now moving to conclusion of current round of work, a final meeting will take next week where they hope to reach agreement on memorandum of understanding. Will then report back to Council to set up ongoing forward plan, as each of the 5 Councils in SW Herts create their own Local Plan.

Cllr Williams referred to future housing development numbers, commenting that it is our intention that as an authority we should retain our numbers.

Cllr England referred to what he views to be the impracticality of our government to reach a Brexit deal and asked; what contingencies have been made or will have to be made, and at what cost, to manage the outcome of these negotiations?

Cllr Williams responded that it is difficult to quantify the effect Brexit will have on Dacorum, confirming that there are no contingencies that Dacorum feels it can make at this time, therefore there is no cost associated.

Cllr Tindall referred to discussions with SW Herts and asked, have any discussions taken place on the staffing issue that most Councils are having with regard to recruitment of professional and technical staff; have there been any attempts to work together to ensure Planning Depts. have adequate expertise?

Cllr Williams responded that both in SW Herts, and independently of that, discussions are taking place around sharing of officers or the bringing together of services to recruit professional staff.

Cllr Tindall asked; in the deliberations, can agreement be made not to 'poach' each other's staff as best as possible?

Cllr Tindall also asked if we have any European staff at risk due to Brexit.

Cllr Williams responded that he is sure that EU workers in UK will be safe past Brexit.

Councillor Marshall, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services

The Portfolio Holder presented her update and invited questions.

CHAIRMAN

Questions:

Cllr Tindall commented that he's received requests from recently expressing concerns about the state of verges and green areas across area, asking; is there a cycle of maintenance for those areas that are being kept to, or have there been changes or problems keeping up with mowing and trimming?

Cllr Marshall advised there is a regular programme of maintaining them which was slightly skewed last year as it was a particularly dry summer so some grass did not need to be mowed. The Portfolio Holder asked if Cllr Tindall could make her aware of any specific areas and she would investigate further.

Cllr Colette Wyatt Lowe pass on congratulations to the Clean, Safe & Green team who responded very quickly to a recent email about an area there was concern with; they tidied up and cut back shrubs very quickly and the resident contacted her to say it showed we are an efficient and responsive Council.

Cllr Marshall thanked Cllr Wyatt Lowe and advised she has passed on the thanks to team following the email she was forwarded.

Cllr Fisher referred to her interest in the press release about plastics and wondered if the Council is able to actively promote the schemes that encourage businesses to participate in schemes. Cllr Fisher further queried if there is a list of businesses who are active in helping reduce single use plastic use.

Cllr Marshall thanked Cllr Fisher for her question and noted the good points about prompting shops and businesses that are at the forefront of reducing the single use plastic problem. The Portfolio Holder advised that she is not able to provide answers at this time, adding that the points raised will need careful consideration.

Councillor Elliot, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources

The Portfolio Holder presented his update and invited questions.

Questions:

Cllr Tindall addressed the Portfolio Holder and commented he was pleased to hear about the Business Rates, but asked; have the government imposed any duties upon us so that when the final scheme is rolled out it will place a lot of duties on Local Authorities, hence they will not be better off?

Cllr Elliot advised that the new initiative is to allow Councils to work together to deliver local projects and share in success in growth of our County, not just within Borough boundaries

Cllr Tindall referred to Universal Credit and commented that the DWP made announcements about changes and delays to scheme, asking the Portfolio Holder; do you agree the government should produce some detail about making changes that we, the Cllrs, could have a further briefing to be able to inform our residents in asked?

Cllr Elliot confirmed yes, the Council will be briefed on anything that would be important.

CHAIRMAN

Cllr Birne referred to 'pot of cash' resulting from the 75% retention of Business Rates and asked; are there any plans for dilution of these funds, or will it be managed centrally ie from the County

Cllr Elliot confirmed that is still in discussion with the County, adding that DBC is a very successful borough so should see a fair share.

Councillor Griffiths, Portfolio Holder for Housing

The Portfolio Holder presented her update as follows;

Tenant & Leaseholder Services

The slight restructure of the Income Team has led to excellent rent collection rates with overall arrears being reduced month on month. Following the rent-free weeks, the arrears were at only 2.9%, which is over £200,000 lower than this time last year. This will put us in an excellent position to mitigate the increasing number of Universal Credit cases

We have a number of staff pressures in the Tenants and Leaseholders team. New starters need considerable training to understand the many functions the Housing Officers role covers and has led to long-term sickness and the remaining officers feeling the pressure to ensure we do not reduce the quality of service we provide. We are undergoing recruitment and hoping to get short-term officers to cover the absences.

Despite this we have taken 70 reports of Social Housing Fraud and have already recovered four properties and have a further four are likely to lead to possession due to sub-letting or non-occupation.

We will be starting a promotion of the Supported Housing Service to encourage private residents to consider having a Life Line alarm. Additionally we will start providing Telecare such as fall detectors, flood sensors and bogus caller alarms to those who need it and allow them to sign up to these through us instead of an external provider. This should improve the quality of life of both tenants and residents and enable them to continue living independently in their own homes.

Strategic Housing

The team have been working closely with other areas of the housing service, in preparation for the completion and handover of the new 79-unit development at Kylna Court, this has required significant resident engagement to raise awareness, advertise and showcase the development to potential new residents. All 79 properties were successfully offered and accepted in December, providing much needed housing to local households. The final phase of the lettings process is to be completed by the end of January, where the team will take full handover and sign up residents for their new home.

Housing Development

- Kylna Court – Completion due next Monday 21st January
- Swing Gate Lane (Corn Mill Court) – Completion March 2019
- Martindale, Stationers Place, Northend and Westerdale all in the process of starting on site

CHAIRMAN

- Pipeline Schemes - St Margaret's Way, Gaddesden Row, Coniston Road, Bulbourne and Eastwick Row – All commencing due diligence work, surveys and in some cases working up designs
- St Margaret's Way – Resident consultation event taken place
- Paradise Fields – Homes England have agreed to sell the site to us
- Resource – Campaign to secure a new Senior Project Manager was not successful, we are trying again through a recruitment agency.

Property & Place

The new Group manager of Property and Place, Alan Mortimer joined Dacorum on 1st October 2018

Our current re-roofing programme of 110 properties, is drawing to a close this year and a full programme for 2019 / 20 has been identified and is being reviewed ready to commence early in the new financial year .

The planning phases for external wall insulation to 28 properties has been completed and the works are programmed to commence in April 2019

Year to date we have invested £1.9m in new kitchen and bathrooms so far this year (budget £2.7m)

We are investing a further £44,000 this year in electrical testing to communal areas in flat blocks

Osborne community investment team have received positive feedback and thanks from the South Hill centre, the Waterside day centre and the Butterfly conservation team at Millhoppers nature reserve in Wilstone.

Large estate improvement projects delivered this year

- Aragon Close – Railings, windows, pointing, guttering
- Riverside Gardens Fascia, Soffits, Gutters and asbestos removal
- 134-156 Fenny croft Road – Render repairs/ re-roofing
- 1-21 Bede Ct – Fascia, Soffits, Gutters, Windows
- 2-6 Pulleys lane Roofing & Estate Improvement Works

The window replacement programme for 2018/19 has progressed well with 100% of the £400k budget now committed for the replacement windows and £384K on external doors, leading to further energy efficiency and improved comfort for tenants. Planning for next years programme is underway.

Osborne Yr 4 extension – the decision on the award of a further year's contract extension has been deferred, pending completion of some identified deliverables

The Portfolio Holder invited questions.

Questions:

There were no questions.

Councillor D Collins, Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Contracted Services

CHAIRMAN

The Portfolio Holder presented his update as follows;

I thought that members would like an update on the service provided by the property and planning law team in 2018.

Matters range from right to buy applications, preparations of new leases and lease renewals, deeds of variation, land sales, and draft 106 planning obligations.

In numbers this has included 27 new leases, 43 Right to buy sales, completion of 14 grant funding agreements enabling 113 new affordable housing units by housing associations for which we will have nomination rights, completion of sales of 10 garage sites generating £5.5 million, successfully defending 2 planning S288 appeals. Last month we successfully obtained an outright possession order on land N/E of Three Cherry Trees Lane and members will have read the release on our crackdowns on unlicensed taxis.

Formal consultations are now being started re options for new parking arrangements in Leverstock Green Aspley 0 Zone and top deck of Water Gardens North Car Park.

Contractors have possession of the Lower Kings Road site to start preparation for the MSCP and the temporary car park on the Moor is now open.

The Portfolio Holder invited questions.

Questions:

Cllr England asked the Portfolio Holder; has a settlement been reached with Dacorum Sports Trust in respect of ongoing arbitration?

Cllr Collins responded that his understanding is that yes, it has.

Cllr England asked the Portfolio Holder to confirm if that is within 10% of the expected amount?

Cllr Collins responded that any discussion on that should be covered under Part 2.

Cllr Williams added that agreement has been reached, but that agreement is subject to a confidentiality agreement

Cllr Ransley asked if improvements to Tring Sport Centre are running on time.

Cllr Collins responded that a meeting of contractors confirmed that refurbishment is progressing and completion will be by end of March/early April for opening in April.

Cllr Colette Wyatt Lowe asked for thanks to be passed on to members of the Legal and Property Departments for dealing with a lease termination that has ended years of misery for local residents, showing again that we are a caring Council.

Cllr Collins agreed and confirmed would pass on comments.

Councillor Harden, Portfolio Holder for Community and Regulatory Services

The Portfolio Holder presented his update as follows;

People Group

CHAIRMAN

Community Safety and Children Services

APGs – New Online registration form in place. Ice cream and slush machines will now be in the playgrounds to increase income. Party hire offer being devised and will be launched soon.

Children’s safeguarding Audit – commenced in January.

CSP – Bids have been submitted to PCC funds: ‘Community Safety School’s Project’ and ‘victim support officer post’ to support ASB cases.

Community partnerships and Leisure

Sports and Physical Activity Strategy – Approved by Cabinet. Working with EA on their sports development & outreach plan so it supports the Council’s own strategy. The Council’s Sports and Physical Activity action plan is well underway.

MASK project – 4th cohort is currently being recruited to start in the Spring.

The Old Town Hall

Sell out performances of Kiki Dee, Rhod Gilbert, Griff Rhys Jones as well as several children’s theatre shows

A massive 92% attendance for the family Christmas Show

The inaugural Old Town Hall Film festival – which looked at different film programme for a different audience

Environmental & Community Protection

Anti-Social Behaviour and Environmental Enforcement

- Anti-social Behaviour Officers, dealing with high level anti-social behaviour across the Borough. Fly-tipping, Littering, Abandoned Vehicles and accumulations.
- ASB review and action plan has been launched. The Improvement and Innovation Team carried out a review of the way the Council manage ASB between the lower level Tenants and Lease Holder Teams across to the more complex ASB cases referred to the ASB team. The action plan has been discussed with key stakeholders & partners within community safety.

Community Protection Notice

Community Protection Notice (CPN) is aimed to prevent unreasonable behavior that is having a negative impact on the local community's quality of life.

Any person aged 16 years or over can be issued with a notice, whether it is an individual or a business, and it will require the behavior to stop and if necessary reasonable steps to be taken to ensure it is not repeated in the future.

CPNs replace current measures including litter clearing, defacement removal and street litter control notices. Some examples of when a CPN may be issued;

CHAIRMAN

- when a dog is constantly escaping through a broken fence the owner could be issued a CPN requiring that the fence be fixed to avoid further escapes,
- a notice could be issued to a local shop/supermarket who are allowing litter to be deposited outside the property,
- to prevent Noise such as regularly playing loud music in a public area

Operations team have been serving Community Protection Notices for accumulations (waste or refuse) on private land, including gardens.

Anti-Social Behaviour have been using them to curb abusive language.

Environmental Health Team have been using them on relevant noise cases.

In Q3 a total of 31 community protection notices have been issued by the department, this is set to increase as we have been looking at wider application of the legislation.

Any members that wish to report an issue that may result in a CPN should email ecp@dacorum.gov.uk.

The Portfolio Holder invited questions.

Questions:

Cllr England thanked the Portfolio Holder for the news on the Sports Strategy action plans. Commenting; it is nearing 12 months since the decision on Sports Strategy was made and asking, will the action plans be presented for scrutiny before the 12 months mark is reached?

Cllr Harden expressed confusion regarding the 12 month figures, but advised there has been a Sports Strategy in place since 2012 which was then developed in 2018 and adopted by Council. We are now developing themes and action plans to come to scrutiny, reviewing sport development outreach plan from our new providers and seeing how that fits with the Councils strategy. Once that is worked out it will also be reported to scrutiny.

Cllr Tindall expressed thanks with regard the community protection notice served on football club and Amazon which relieved local residents of the nuisance of having vans clogging up the area. Grateful for action taken by officers.

Cllr England referred to the air quality action plan for 2015-2018 commenting that we are now in 2019 and advising that he is therefore looking for an update as this was produced in 2014, asked the PH to advise when update can be expected.

Cllr Harden confirmed that he confirm and advise Council.

Councillor G Sutton, Portfolio Holder for Planning & Infrastructure

The Portfolio Holder presented his update as follows;

Planning Application for 1100 new homes at West Hemel Hempstead submitted

The planning application for site LA3, land west of Hemel Hempstead, was submitted to the Council on 21 December 2018. It contains detailed proposals for a first series of phases of development for 350 new homes and also seeks outline planning

CHAIRMAN

permission for later phases for 750 homes. The total proposals include new open spaces, a new primary school within a new community hub. The application is being checked by our planning team currently and I expect formal consultation with the community should commence, once all information is available online, later this month.

Measures to protect business premises put in place

I am pleased to announce that we have published proposals to bring in new, localised planning constraints affecting the Borough's most significant commercial and business areas to prevent the loss of many commercial premises to residential use without the need for planning permission.

Changes introduced by the Government in the early part of the decade have allowed for the conversion of office premises, and latterly some warehouse and industrial buildings to residential use without the need for traditional planning permission to be obtained from the Council. We have seen some good examples of how this has worked in Hemel Hempstead Town Centre with good conversions of older, unlettable office space to provide new housing at places such as Stephyn's Chambers and Swan Court.

There are concerning signs however that there are proposals to lose good quality commercial space at Maylands and it is important that we have the right controls in place to protect these sites to help ensure our local economy remains strong and can continue to develop and prosper.

The Development Management Committee approved the service of a series of 'Article 4 directions' to bring these new controls in, at its meeting on 13 December. The proposals are now out to consultation and the Council will take into account any views received. To comply with legislation, the new directions will come into effect in just under 12 months' time.

Further extension to the Maylands Business Centre set to open soon

The scaffolding is now down and the final touches are being made to our superb development at Kylna Court at Maylands, which will provide new council apartments and an extension to the Maylands Business Centre, providing 8 new business units.

Building Control service continues to flourish

Finally I would like to make a few points about the Council's Local Authority Building Control service.

Since mid-2018 work won by the service has risen by 9%. This has been achieved through a new approach to marketing our services and the creation of a new service hub that aims to turn decisions around, where possible, within one day.

An effective building control service is essential to ensure the safety of the users of buildings and the general public through the efficient yet diligent discharge of the requirements of the national building regulations. The service is also responsible for

CHAIRMAN

responding to dangerous structures incidents where public safety may be affected, and they do this 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Finally, whilst on the subject of Building Control, may I offer my thanks to the service for their prompt attention with regard to the fire at the TDS office in Mark Road on the 9th January. They attended the site as soon as the fire was out and submitted their report in super quick time.

Also I would like to thank the team led by Lesley Crisp for the care and consideration that they offered to the staff. TDS lost everything in the fire but the quick response from Lesley and her team meant that a number of TDS staff were "business as usual" on Thursday. We will continue to offer support as and when required.

The Portfolio Holder invited questions.

Questions:

Cllr Guest referred to the LA3 application and asked the Portfolio Holder if he is aware if planning officers are engaging with infrastructure advisors such as NHS England, education providers such as HCC and also Highways?

Cllr Sutton responded to give assurance that everything, including infrastructure, will be taken into consideration in the normal process of the consideration of this application.

5 QUESTIONS

None.

6 BUSINESS FROM THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING

None.

7 CABINET REFERRALS

That the following be approved:

11 December 2018

7.1 CA/128/18 COMMITTEE TIMETABLE 2019/20

Decision

That Cabinet recommends Council approve the Meeting Timetable for 2019/20 as set out in Appendix A to this report.

Corporate objectives

The various meetings of the Council, Cabinet and Committees support the achievement of the Council's Corporate Objectives.

Seconded and agreed.

8 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REFERRALS

None.

9 CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Cllr Tindall advised that following completion of relevant training session, he is nominating Cllr Pringle as substitute to Licensing.

CHAIRMAN

10 CHANGE TO COMMITTEE DATES

None.

11 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

To consider passing a resolution in the following terms:

That, under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded during the item in Part II of the Agenda for this meeting, because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, that if members of the public were present during this item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information relating to the financial and business affairs of the Council and third party companies/organisations.

(Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part 1, Paragraph 3).

The Meeting ended at 8.25 pm

CHAIRMAN