

MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

4 FEBRUARY 2020

Councillors: Adeleke (Vice-Chairman)
Mrs Bassadone
England
Imarni (Chairman)
Arslan
Durrant
Johnson
Barry
Freedman

Officers: Mark Gaynor Corporate Director - Housing & Regeneration
Fiona Jump Group Manager - Financial Services
Linda Roberts Assistant Director - Performance, People and Innovation
Sarah Turner PA to the Corporate Directors
Fiona Williamson Assistant Director - Housing

Also in Attendance: Banks
Griffiths

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

10 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2020 were agreed by Members present and signed by the Chair.

11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Mahmood, Pringle, Oguchi and Hollinghurst

12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

13 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation

14 **CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN**

None

15 **BUDGET PREPARATIONS 2020/21**

F Jump presented the report and asked Committee for any questions.

Cllr England said that on page 20 there is a £200k variance on garages and asked if that was the identified additional income that we think we get in successive years. F Williamson replied that this was a reduction from the budgeted income that is forecast for next year, to allow for all of the work that the review will produce, in respect of any investment programme or rationalisation or one of the other options to replace them with modular garages and it was mentioned earlier about the life expectancy of garages. That is down to block by block and then down to the individual components and that's the information we are lacking at the moment in terms of collecting information. Whilst all of that is in train we have been conservative in our estimate in respect of whether that will generate any additional income next year. From the modelling we've done in terms of the garages let against the garages returned that is the impact on the budget for next year.

Cllr England said that hopefully with all this activity recently income might be higher but it's best to assume on the downside. L Roberts mentioned that there is always what she would call a hockey stick, so you're always going to have a little bit of a dip before you get your increase, because we are spending on the project itself.

Cllr Johnson mentioned that on page 12 it mentions tree work for housing HRA and wondered if that was planting trees or pruning, pollarding and removing trees. F Williamson said it was a specific sum for tree survey for trees on HRA land, so that's in response to some problems that they've been outside of the borough in terms of tree management, so we want to ensure we manage that risk by undertaking a survey of existing trees.

Cllr England said on page 20 that the homelessness income figure seems to have a variance of 53% which he feels is a large variance and asked for an explanation. F Jump said that it was additional income for temporary accommodation that we are expecting next year as a result of the conversion of estates properties and also garage conversions as well.

Cllr England asked about the Adventure Playgrounds on page 21 is showing a 28% increase in income likely, it seems like a big increase. L Roberts said when you look at it in black and white it is a big increase but it's not a large number. Again it comes back to support for marketing, so we are really going to target birthday parties, that type of thing, so far I've got no reason to question why we won't achieve it.

Cllr England said it looks as if there is a cut of about £39k on the community development, residents services and neighbourhood action and that appears to be balanced out in similar in community development in parishes. Cllr England asked they were related and is that right that we're choosing to spend more in parished

areas than non-parished areas, is there any rationale for that. F Jump confirmed they were not related, there is a budget realignment but the two areas are not connected.

Cllr England asked what is the rationale behind spending less on residents services and neighbourhood action. L Roberts advised that we've changed how that side of things are managed, so some of them are being managed in housing and some is coming through her area. F Williamson confirmed that we have taken on the ASB team based on the fact that the majority of cases were related to housing. L Roberts said we are not stopping doing anything it's a realignment of budget.

The Chairman asked for a detailed explanation as she was aware of the restructuring but we were never really given a brief on what that looked like. F Williamson advised it is the transfer of two officers from the ASB team into the Housing Service. There was a review of the service requirements and as a result of that review it was determined that it would be better if the ASB was managed within the Housing Service because of the higher proportion of housing cases, so it's been a question of transferring those staff from Linda's area into Housing.

The Chairman mentioned that she understood that we have one less member of staff now due to the restructure. L Roberts confirmed that was the case, it wasn't just her area, there was also Environmental Services which is Emma's area and that's where the reduction in staff occurred but we don't have her budget in these numbers, it's just the impact on ours.

The Chairman asked about the seven further garage sites identified and the figures on here that show we've been very proactive and there are sometimes concerns about infrastructure, parking etc. which comes up with every development and thought it would be interesting for Members to know where those sites are. In the past Officers have been quite good at informing Councillors if they are in their specific areas but it would be interesting for the Committee to have an understanding which of the seven sites that have been highlighted and what potential infrastructure problems have you addressed. F Williamson confirmed she didn't have that detail, we are just in the process of working up the feasibility studies, so I can provide the details of the sites in terms of their locations, but in respect of the disposals programme, there was a number of key factors that were taken into account when identifying sites that would be suitable for potential development. The first of which was displacement of vehicles from one site, trying to find adjacent sites that had available garages, so that people then could move to an adjacent site. That was one of the key criteria's identified during that process, when sites were considered for disposal. M Gaynor advised that the person who might have the answers are in Finance at the moment so we can provide an answer for you and the rest of the Committee after the meeting. Cllr Griffiths confirmed that the relative Councillors are consulted before anything further is done, so you will know if you are the Ward Councillor because they come to you as part of the process.

Cllr England asked for clarification on the 800 blocks we have in the whole Borough and of those does that include the sites which were identified and signed off in 2014 as being for disposal. L Roberts said that it does include those that have been identified, but it doesn't include the ones that we've sold, but it does include those that have been identified because at the moment we've not sold them. Cllr England queried if we are still letting them until they are sold. L Roberts advised that we were

and as well as the ability to conveniently transfer, occupancy levels was another thing that we were considering, when that disposal review was done they were looking at the occupancy levels were like then, so we'll look at the occupancy levels again to see how that factors into what is done. Cllr England said that the 2014 cohort of garages was quite a large number of blocks. L Roberts advised it was all of them. Cllr England said that we are not getting through them very much.

Cllr England asked if when the decision were made in 2014 to dispose of certain blocks that was done without any up to date stock condition on those blocks. F Williamson confirmed they did have the stock information from the 2009 survey so they did have some stock data and each site was reviewed prior to it going on the list so they actually had valuers going out to site because one of the other criteria is around developability of the site, so things like access can cause problems and then render a site not suitable for any large scale development which means that the market value for an alternative use is lower. Cllr England asked if Councillors will get an opportunity to review that 2014 list in the light of the information we now know and possibly the side that that needs to be done differently. The Chairman asked for what purpose. Cllr England said to make the best decision about the assets that we have. F Williamson replied that until we have that information we can't make any decisions in respect of the longer term use of those sites, but they obviously fulfil the criteria that we assessed them for in terms occupancy of other sites and current occupancy developability, so those are unlikely to have changed but it may be that once we've actually obtained all of the stock information and allowing for the passage of time, the occupancy rates may have changed so we may need to relook at them. One of these supplementary pieces of work that is falling out of the sites that have been identified and also from the high level stock information that we have collected, is just the presence of unauthorised use or wayleaves that have been created that then obviously can cause some ongoing problems, so that's another thing that's being picked up as part of the garage project. We need to ensure that we have clean sites for disposal.

Cllr England asked for an explanation of the term wayleave. F Williamson said that a wayleave is a legal access across a piece of land that's not owned by individuals, some people have been driving across the garage forecourt to get to their rear garden to park a car. Cllr England said if they have been doing that for long enough then they have a right to do it. F Williamson said they could put an adverse possession claim in, but they would have to provide sufficient evidence to support their claim, so each case would have to be dealt with on an individual basis. Cllr England asked how many of those have arisen. F Williamson said hopefully not too many but part of this process is identifying any use that obviously means that we need to regularise.

The Chairman asked what the length of time they needed to have been doing that to be able to put a claim in, it's quite a long time. F Williamson said that it was a minimum of 12 years depending on whether there is any covenant or statutory limitations sometimes its 21 years.

Cllr Adeleke wanted to know how long is the refurbishment programme of garages going to be. L Roberts advised we don't have a set period of time, it's about the programme that we're currently underway to facilitate the 300 people that we've identified who say they want one, we are actually getting those ready so that we can move quickly, our occupancy level has gone down and we are trying to protect that

income, so we match a customer with a garage as quickly as we can. Going forward there needs to be an investment proposal which will be mapped onto an ongoing maintenance plan.

The Chairman confirmed that the Budget report had been scrutinised by the Committee and feedback has been provided for Cabinet.

16 GARAGE PROGRAMME

The Garage Programme was discussed in detail at the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

17 PORTFOLIO HOLDER KEY PRIORITIES

Cllr Banks, the Portfolio Holder for Community and Regulatory Services, confirmed the services priorities for the next year and asked if there was any questions.

Cllr Adeleke thanked Cllr Banks for a very good presentation and from what's been said so far it looks as if it's going to be a very interesting year, so thank you and your team.

Cllr Adeleke asked about the 2020 Year of Culture, we've gone through the programme and he is still not clear how much activity we are putting out to outer Hemel Hempstead area. The Chairman said that it doesn't seem apparent anywhere in Hertfordshire that she has been recently that it's Herts Year of Culture, it's not a criticism for Dacorum, but been to Broxbourne and East Herts and it's not obvious there either. Is there a way to beef it up so it's more obvious, I thought we'd get to 1st January and it would be everywhere, you'd be sick of seeing the signs. L Roberts advised that there is only minimal Officer support at Hertfordshire level and they have been dependent upon getting the level of participation at the Borough level. We have been fortunate that we've got Annie who's very passionate about and has actively worked with Hertfordshire to see what we can do, but we don't get huge sight of what goes on in other areas and if they've not got an officer dedicated to do it, we wouldn't necessarily see it. I think it will vary, there isn't a set thing that we've all been asked to do.

Cllr Banks mentioned that we had the flag out the first week of January. At the last Full Council and throughout the coming year, she has asked Officers to make sure there was a presentation for Members outside Full Council, so last Full Council we had a display table, what's happening in January and February. It's been Facebook and it will be advertised through the Old Town Hall publication and their newsletter, what you are looking for is the rainbow coloured 2020 logo, but it's supporting all sorts of things from very classic arts and delivery of culture, right the way through to tea dances and get togethers. They are doing a tea and chat downstairs in the Café area, inviting people to come in and meet up.

L Roberts said if you are here on a Thursday lunchtime, be very aware that there is now a staff choir taking place. Cllr Banks said it was open to all Forum employees, so CCG, Credit Union and CAB members are there as well.

The Chairman said that obviously there has been a lot of effort, but you kind of have to be using those facilities, it's not the best example but when the fair is here, every time you stop at traffic lights there's a poster or in shop windows and I kind of felt that Herts Year of Culture would be similar. Cllr Banks totally agrees and she has asked about roadside signage but that's a Herts County Council issue. Cllr Griffiths mentioned the posters, how a lot of those are flyposting and that's illegal.

Cllr Adeleke asked about his question where a lot of events are Hemel based, what activities have we got in other towns and villages. Cllr Banks replied that Herts Year of Culture is across Dacorum so there are activities in the villages and a lot of the projects are being delivered through their public facing buildings, community centres and Town Council's, I would need to get you a list because it is quite extensive or you can check it out on the Dacorum website, it's there under it's own page.

Cllr Adeleke queried a point he had made previously where getting the canteen going why can't the staff be given discount to encourage them to go out in their lunchtime. Cllr Banks said the point has been raised before but she hasn't had any update so will take it away and come back to you. Cllr Adeleke said there was a ready made market here, so why don't we make use of it. L Roberts replied that it was quite a distance, not massive, but it is a reasonable distance between here and the Old Town Hall. Cllr Adeleke said they walk all the way to the end of Marlowes lunchtime and walk to the Marchmont. L Roberts understood what was being said but it's not necessarily people just having lunch they're doing jobs as well, which is actually in the heart of the town. L Roberts confirmed it was certainly something we could look at but what has happened is there is a new Officer started working with Sara on the operational side and he's quite positive and passionate about how he can do something about the food and catering. Nobody responded to the tender, so there was no interest from anybody, it wasn't that there was some and they weren't suitable, there was just no interest, so we are taking it back in house and we will be looking at what we can do to maximise the revenue but I don't think you get a huge amount of revenue necessarily from staff going up there, because I don't see a huge number of people going up there.

Action: Cllr Banks to check discount for staff on catering at Old Town Hall

Cllr Adeleke mentioned that a few years ago, each issue of Dacorum Digest used to feature a Councillor and asked if this could be re-introduced, perhaps two or three Councillors at the same time. L Roberts replied that we could look into this and find out what drives the agenda, we look at some of the news that is actually being delivered in terms of the Council. We went through a large period of regeneration, so there were lots of project to talk about, so that might be something that can be considered, so I'll take it back to Comms and find out, how that all happened and what's the rationale going forward. Cllr Adeleke thought that the kind of statements were non-political, it was about their interests and hobbies and made interesting reading. Cllr Griffiths mentioned it was a voluntary thing and thought that the number of Councillors who wanted to do it dwindled. Cllr England said there was a large intake in May. Cllr Griffiths advised this stopped about 10 years ago.

Action: L Roberts to discuss Cllr biography in Dacorum Digest with Comms

The Chairman mentioned that when the Old Town Hall came to Committee before we asked if the site was suitable for any heritage grants, because when you look at holding functions it's not the most competitive or the most comfortable choice, so if that could be picked up with Officers and see how they are getting on.

Action: L Roberts to check Heritage Grants for Old Town Hall

The Chairman also mentioned that it was difficult to navigate on the website, even in terms of finding the Committee Timetable and notes, she always has to use Google, to search on the website doesn't throw anything up. The Chairman asked if it was possible for it to be user tested and give feedback on what would make it easier to navigate.

Action: L Roberts to investigate

Cllr Banks said that with the Old Town Hall, in the coming financial year, there will be new seating in the theatre, that's already planned, obviously funding streams is always something that I'm sure the team are looking at and she will take the comment back to the team, but certainly within the main theatre, there are plans for the new seating to be installed and has already been ordered. L Roberts advised it had been ordered.

Cllr Griffiths, the Portfolio Holder for Housing, outlined the key priorities for the Housing Service and asked the Committee if they had any questions.

Cllr Friedman said there was a lot of ambition and can see a lot of spend in new staff and requested a quick narrative on how much impact we will have in the first year of this, because it's quite ambitious targets focussing on a lot of stuff but there is other things that might need focussing on as well, but I think that's more than enough for one year. How challenging are those targets going to be with the extra resource that you've got and is there any notable resource requests that were made that you didn't manage to get. Cllr Griffiths confirmed it would be a challenging year, but it's also building on the base that we have already started, if you take the Private Sector Housing and the Homeless initiative for instance, that's been a strategy that's been running for two or three years now and we're basically building and building and building. Last year Housing took over the PRS and that was a case of baselining, getting our systems in place and it's now building on that, so that they are almost hitting the ground running, the people coming in. They are not necessarily all new staff, they might have transferred in from somewhere else, it's also about giving responsibility to established staff so that we don't lose them because they feel they've got nowhere to go, so it's about career progression as well and enabling people that have been there for a while and are therefore already trained up, perhaps just taking them to the next level in their own personal development.

Cllr Friedman mentioned the reports to the system and making various expenditures on high risk parts of the assets and asked if the actual costs of making those works, possibly in the Capital account, but couldn't see the budget for that works. Cllr Griffiths replied that some of the work will already be in the budget for general maintenance and safety, we already have budgets under the overarching headings and we have got more detailed budget headlines. A lot of those will be picked up in all of those. Cllr Friedman said this would be more about not trying to get more repairs done in the year, but trying to get the right repairs done first is that correct. F Williamson confirmed it was mainly around the fire risk assessment work and we have made provision in the budget for a rolling programme of fire safety work, undertaking the fire risk assessment is just the first part of the process. You then need to prioritise the risk assessments that you have, which block you would start with, that could be based on the height, the nature of the residents, the nature of the risk. We work with the Fire Service to align our risk ratings with those of the fire risk

assessors, the Fire Service and also understanding about the needs and vulnerabilities of any of our residents that live within any of our sheltered schemes or general needs blocks. The system is one that will be able to crunch the data to actually align with our strategy, which sets out we can't do everything in year one, so therefore we will target our investment in those highest risk priority blocks. The software will enable us to have a ratings system so that we can then profile the budget over the next five years so that we're covering off all our obligations under fire safety.

Cllr Adeleke mentioned he liked the catchphrase 'spend to save' and asked if Cllr Griffiths could expand on it and also how client is prioritised for temporary accommodation, there was a very disturbing programme on the radio this morning about temporary accommodation involving another Council, what precautions and checks do we have in place for people in our Borough who we put in temporary accommodation are not subjected to this kind of treatment. F Williamson said the programme was specifically related to permitted development of conversion of office blocks into residential use and some fairly limited controls over the type and nature of accommodation that was being provided. In terms of temporary accommodation that the Council use for people that we're discharging our own duty, the majority of which we either own or work in conjunction with partner agencies, we own the Elms but it's run by Dens, so we have a good oversight of the quality of the temporary accommodation that we use. We have also converted some general needs accommodation into temporary accommodation so we know that's compliant with our own internal standards, so we don't have concerns over temporary accommodation because we manage our own stock and corporately the approach to permitted development has also been reviewed, certainly in respect of trying to ensure we don't have a large number of office blocks converted to residential in locations that perhaps are not suitable for residential or the blocks themselves are not suitable for conversion. M Gaynor added that there is an Article 4 Directive for Maylands which prevents permitted development of industrial, commercial or office into residential, essentially we don't have an issue with our temporary accommodation is because it's either stock that we own already or a registered provider or partners who also have a duty to do it properly, so we don't face those situations in Dacorum.

Cllr Adeleke said he was not talking about the physical side of the scheme, he is talking about the mental and emotional side, because what the lady was saying is she was put in accommodation where other residents are drug users, addicts and so on. M Gaynor said that we don't put people in that situation. Cllr Adeleke asked if we have checks on individuals to make sure that we don't mix. M Gaynor said that most of the properties that we use for temporary accommodation are separate dwellings. F Williamson advised that everyone that presents as homeless has a personal housing plan developed and within that any known vulnerabilities or addictions are considered at that point and therefore when we are discharging our duty we may discharge our duty to a partner agency that provides drug and alcohol support, so for instance the Elms is a dry centre so it doesn't allow drugs or alcohol use on the premises. Where people are suspected to be intoxicated or under the influence of drugs and they go back to the Elms they can be asked to leave, so there are some fairly rigid stipulations that we set down to ensure that people are safe.

Cllr England mentioned that he attended a LGA Climate Emergency Conference which was very good. Lots of Councils were there, lots of Officers and a few various Members. One of the things that was pushed by a guy called Deta Hai, who's a rock

star environmental scientist who has written lots of books, was that we all as Councils and as individuals we need to think about our carbon diary. We get up in the morning and what do we do, we turn the lights on, that's carbon, we flush the toilet, that's carbon, we brush our teeth, we use the toaster and so on. There's a perception that somehow we've reduced our carbon footprint in this country, but the reality is that because we've offshored lots of manufacturing to China, that's how we've done it. The point of the question is, it's really good that we're doing the baseline CO2 and obviously this is Housing Committee, so Dacorum is a large housing stockholder, at the conference there were lots of different Council's, rural ones, city ones, big ones and small ones, there was a lot of talk about how Councils are all different shapes and sizes, but there was also a strong point that said if you are a large housing stock holder then housing is a key thing that you can do early and first. Insulation and heating are big things, a big warning sign that came up was that if we're all going to switch from gas central heating to heat pumps, at the moment 20,000 heat pumps were fitted last year and we need to upscale that to something like millions. When do we think there will be a project plan for how the Council is going to address what we said was a climate emergency last year. M Gaynor said we are working on getting the Council's baseline position, both in housing and in the rest of what we do, that will point to the areas where we need to prioritise, we can anticipate what most of those will be already but it will actually be matched with evidence. The aim is to produce an initial action plan and there will be debate and discussion about what the priorities will be, it does need to be cautioned about jumping to things that sound good, which may end up being wasted money, so if you'd put lots of EV charging points in about eight years ago, they'd all be pretty useless now compared to what we want to do. It's got to be a reasonable and balanced approach. We also need to take into account that we've done a lot already, there's an awful lot of works that some Councils will have to do, that we've done already in terms of the Council housing stock. The initial action plan will be around about April/May and there are key decisions to make over the longer period because the we need to be zero carbon by 2030, but there are some issues which will take longer to resolve because we also require to have an offsetting approach, which might be tree planting or a whole range of things. That's in the process of emerging it, it is an emergency but it doesn't mean you can rush to do something to look like you're doing something, it's better to do the right things, that will come later on in the Spring.

Cllr England mentioned that at the conference there was a show of hands in terms of how many Councils have declared a climate emergency and a forest of hands went up and how many Councils have got somewhere with their strategy and fewer hands went up, but quite a few hands did go up. MG said that he would struggle to find many that were that meaningful, Nottingham probably is because they've been doing things for a long time, they are very initial statement aims rather than actual action plans. We need to do both but we need to get somewhere which is deliverable and meaningful. Cllr England said our methodology is based on what people think going to conferences, like I have and hearing the same things as me. M Gaynor advised we are working with APSE Energy, they are one of the leaders in the field in terms of advising local authorities and we are working with them on how to develop our strategy and action plan already, so we have that technical assistance, they pick up all the best practice from other local authorities.

18 WORK PROGRAMME

Cllr England had emailed a question to the Chairman about the Work Programme and the Chairman apologised for not responding, but it was thought to be part of a bigger piece of work that the Chairman is doing with Mark Brookes and is scheduled to come to Committee and will be meeting with Officers over the next couple of weeks and will be able to update where that will be included and when it will be coming to Committee.

There were no changes to the Work Programme.

The Meeting ended at 9.30 pm