

MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

3 JUNE 2020

Councillors: Mrs Bassadone
England
Imarni (Chairman)
Mahmood
Pringle
Durrant
Johnson
Oguchi
Hollinghurst
Barry
Freedman

Officers:	Natasha Beresford	Group Manager - Strategic Housing
	Mark Gaynor	Corporate Director - Housing & Regeneration
	Cynthia Hayford	Homeless Prevention and Assessment Team Leader
	Lynne Hunt	Private Sector Housing Team Leader
	Fiona Jump	Group Manager - Financial Services
	Linda Roberts	Assistant Director - Performance, People and Innovation
	Sarah Turner	PA to the Corporate Directors

Also Attendance: Banks
Williams
Stevens
Griffiths

The meeting began at 6.30 pm

30 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4th March 2020 were agreed by members present

31 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

32 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

33 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

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

None

35 **PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2019/20**

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

Cllr England wanted to record his appreciation of how Officers are dealing with the current situation and said that looking at the report it's as is Covid isn't happening, he enquired when we would get to an accurate outlook. F Jump confirmed that the report is for 19/20 and therefore does not include the Covid impact which will not be known until the first report for 20/21.

Cllr Freedman echoed the thanks to staff and queried if post events, were there a number of things in the report that will have changed, also if the report was being prepared now would there be any key data you would highlight. F Jump advised that we are keeping a very close eye on the bad debts provision, it is under constant review, but realistically it's too early to say exactly what the impacts are on this financial year.

Cllr Mahmood asked why the need for the delegation of power to Audit Committee for movements. F Jump confirmed this was in regards to the publication of accounts and was moved to keep it in line with the published timetable.

Cllr Mahmood wanted to know if the Covid impact is minimal on last years budget. F Jump replied that it was but the current year would be clearer. Cllr Mahmood said that he would look forward to the first report.

Cllr Freedman noted that Universal Credit had been less adverse than had been prepared for. F Williamson advised that in respect of Universal Credit there had been a lot of F Jump presented the report and asked Committee for any questions.

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Cllr Freedman noted that Universal Credit had been less adverse than had been prepared for. F Williamson advised that in respect of Universal Credit there had been a lot of work undertaken in year, so this report was accurate. F Williamson also mentioned that there will be a dramatic increase post Covid and the impact on the in-year rent position will change.

Cllr Freedman enquired if the call on Universal credit now has been worked out or do we still have any teething problems. F Williamson confirmed that last year managing the process had reflected in the figures, but the sheer volume for this year couldn't have been anticipated, we have contacted more people at home to assess situations and give the necessary support.

The Chairman said she was aware of all the work that Officers are doing and would echo all the comments, she thanked everyone very much for their efforts. work undertaken in year, so this report was accurate. F Williamson also mentioned that there will be a dramatic increase post Covid and the impact on the in-year rent position will change.

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36 **CHILDREN SERVICES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP, CUSTOMER SERVICES, THE OLD TOWN HALL, COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS Q4 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

L Roberts introduced the report and asked the Committee for any questions.

Councillor Banks said that as Portfolio Holder she had been very impressed with how the services had overcome the problems, especially where some of the big events had to be cancelled and the efforts of the CSU. Cllr Banks thanked everyone for all they had done.

Cllr Mahmood queried if the Council has a homeworking policy. L Roberts confirmed that we do have policies as people were encouraged to work from home when we moved to the Forum, so we've been able to do it quite successfully, overall it's been very positive.

Cllr Mahmood asked about the domestic violence and if it's been an issue recently due to Covid. L Roberts advised the report was for the final quarter of last year so it will be in the report for next year.

Cllr Mahmood wanted to know if targets could be revised, namely the abandoned call rates and 450 seconds, as the outputs were well within these targets. L Roberts advised they could be changed but it would not be a great time to change them due to the impact of Covid, this could be reconsidered later in the year when we are back closer to normal.

Cllr Mahmood queried whether the Old Town Hall was closed. L Roberts confirmed that it was and that staff were working virtually to support artists, processing refunds and working on what will happen in the future with social distancing, how it will impact on the income as we would be limited to approximately 30 seats rather than 100.

Cllr England mentioned that he was mystified how we have managed to downgrade a target without approval from Overview and Scrutiny. L Roberts confirmed she had sent round an email detailing the change. Cllr England requested that the target was reinstated to 210 seconds and wanted it reviewed at Committee. Cllr Banks advised she would discuss with L Roberts and bring back to the next meeting.

Action: L Roberts/Cllr Banks

Cllr Barry enquired where the 3G pitches will be placed at Grovehill playing field. L Roberts confirmed they would not be in the playing field, there is a concrete area at the side of the Adventure Playground.

Cllr England asked if there is any opportunities to link in to the climate emergency at Adventure Playgrounds. L Roberts confirmed this hadn't been specifically looked into but she will investigate the options including the costs. Cllr England raised concerns that out of the 10years we have already had 10% of the time and unless we take decisions that will impact our carbon footprint, not worrying about the financial, we will miss the bus.

Cllr Banks highlighted that the Adventure Playground's wooden equipment had been removed and that Grovehill had an active environmental group who go out little picking etc.

The Chairman asked what kind of feedback staff are getting from customers when they are speaking to them and how do you keep them interested, offering streaming or online events. L Roberts clarified that we will look to see if we can stream, for example, comedy shows, but probably on you tube. The Chairman asked if this could be investigated and also if people can book tickets for next year, paying for the tickets now. L Roberts will investigate and provide a strategy to Committee.

Action: L Roberts

Cllr Mahmood suggested an open air theatre possibly in Gadebridge Park, you could have a stage and socially distance.

37 HOUSING Q4 PERFORMANCE

F Williamson introduced the report and asked if Committee had any questions.

Cllr Mahmood asked who Sopra Steria were. F Williamson confirmed they were a local company who went through the procurement processes and had been appointed under New Normal to streamline processes. They are working on a proof of concept process.

Cllr Mahmood enquired if the 32 day key to key period was working days. F Williamson confirmed it was calendar days.

Cllr Mahmood said that he had noticed that the service objectives had started in 2018 and finished in 2019 and asked if there would be any new ones. F Williamson advised that there is a new service plan for this year, we've had to revisit some of the objectives due to Covid, but most of them will be new.

Cllr Mahmood commented that in light of social distancing what are we doing to ensure work can be carried out in homes. F Williamson explained that we have had two remobilisation meetings to ensure that we work safely, both on external sites and in homes. We carry out risk assessments prior to starting work onsite and the operatives have to sign to confirm they comply with Covid restrictions. Work in sheltered schemes has been suspended but we have had to increase cleaning in schemes, so there will be an impact on key to key times.

Cllr Pringle asked how the increase in domestic abuse due to lockdown had been identified. N Beresford stated there has been an increase and this has been identified via the victims and perpetrators, engagement with the Police and where we are making placements into temporary accommodation. We have also seen an increase of reports from male victims but we've needed to seek support from elsewhere as there are no facilities for men in Dacorum. Due to Covid there has been a reduced capacity within refuges across the county, but there will be a new dedicated refuge with six units in Dacorum and completion of sale is next week.

38 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY

N Beresford outlined the Private Sector Housing Strategy and offered Committee the opportunity to ask questions.

Cllr Hollinghurst was very pleased with how the Council is working on this and wanted to say very well done and that he supports this project.

Cllr Mahmood asked if landlords paid a fee for HMO's and how this could be re-invested. Cllr Mahmood asked if we could look at selective licensing. N Beresford said that they do have to pay for licences, there is a part 1 and part 2 fee and also an ongoing management fee, plus an enforcement fee (if landlord doesn't freely apply for licence). All fees are re-invested into private sector housing as fees are ring-fenced. We could look at selective licensing in the future but we are not currently able to commit to this as we have a very small team who do not have the capacity and have to focus on the mandatory licencing and bringing empty homes back into use.

Cllr Mahmood commented that it was a very good report.

The Chairman echoed that it was a very comprehensive report that is easy to follow and clearly sets out our intentions.

39 **HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

N Beresford presented the Homelessness Strategy and asked Committee for questions.

Cllr Durrant queried if there is a hotel in Dacorum that is being used for asylum seekers. N Beresford advised that is correct, we have been working with the Home Office to ensure that they are effectively managed and there have been no issues reported. The Home Office are paying.

Cllr England wanted to say congratulations on running an excellent service and mentioned the two grant funding amounts of £7.5K which we have received and whether the actual amount of £49k that has been spent will be reimbursed. N Beresford confirmed that it wouldn't automatically be reimbursed. The first £7.5k funding was for the rough sleeper snapshot and street outreach workers, which reduced the number from 23 to below 10 and was based on six rough sleepers at that time. Then there was a further ability to claim additional funds and we have claimed the maximum funds available. The Council has had additional funding for its Covid response, but this will offset against the overall bottom line and pressures on overall budgets. Additionally funding has been allocated to County (26million) and we can attempt to claim costs from Herts County Council, we have had a successful claim for DENS for £40k due to their additional support provided to us during this time.

Cllr England said about the domestic abuse figures are up due to Covid. N Beresford said yes, the figures provided on Friday show a significant increase and they are reflective of what we are seeing in the service, not only in Dacorum but other parts of the County.

Cllr England mentioned that on page 145 the table refers to 1,568 cases and two thirds of these have been closed but give no reason, he suggested that the data could be changed to successful outcomes, inconclusive outcomes and not successful outcomes. N Beresford agreed that the data can raise more questions, but that it's H-CLIC government data that is a proforma put directly into our system so we do not have the ability to change it, it has been an issue for some time, some districts are manually counting, we are having a systems update in October and it is hoped that will enable us to manipulate the drop downs to provide more accurate data reporting.

Cllr Bassadone said she was very sad to hear that we were using bed and breakfast and asked how many non-DBC people do we have staying in accommodation plus how much is the additional cost to DBC. N Beresford confirmed it was disappointing but we have to be aware of the wider picture, we are very lucky, our colleagues in Stevenage have 100 in bed and breakfast, Watford and Broxbourne are very similar. Whilst we do have some in bed and breakfast we are in a much more favourable position, with 5 households in bed and breakfast currently (no families or young children). All our clients in temporary accommodation are all known to us and have been in the Borough for some time, we have 2 clients who have no recourse to public funds and this has cost us approximately £9k, which we are working to reclaim from Herts County Council.

Cllr Bassadone asked if some of the costs will fall on residents who are tax-payers. N Beresford said it would as not all costs will be fully met and it will have an impact on the budget. Cllr Bassadone added that Natasha and her team do a fantastic job and thanked them for everything they do.

Cllr Mahmood said that this was a very good policy which included good outcomes and thanked Natasha. Cllr Mahmood asked if sheltered housing could be adapted for the homeless. N Beresford replied that as part of the Service Plan the Team Leader from Supported Housing has undertaken a review and looked at the schemes and a number of properties across the borough have been decommissioned and vice versa. There is a commitment from Team Leaders to look at ways to review what we offer ensuring that sites that are fit for purpose. N Beresford also advised that sheltered is being used for emergency accommodation in the current pandemic.

Cllr Johnson welcomed the five commitments and asked queried the high proportion of vulnerability does not translate into assistance. N Beresford advised that as part of the recovery she was one of the Leads on the Accommodation and Recovery Cell which is reviewing all the date of complex needs, which shows there may be a need for additional support. The funding received to establish the Housing First project for rough sleepers undertook a count two weeks ago and identified no rough sleepers. The service was successful for a further tranche of Rough Sleeper Initiative funding and were awarded a further £115k, which will be used to recruit a drug and alcohol worker and further extension to the Housing First scheme.

Cllr England queried why the Homelessness Forum was no longer being chaired by DENS, it was now Hightown, but he felt that DENS was more appropriate. N Beresford clarified that the Chair was Wendy Lewington of DENS and it was time for re-election and the Head of Housing at Hightown was elected as Chair supported by Wendy as Vice Chair, plus Wendy Chairs the sub group on mental health/drugs & alcohol, which is where Wendy has explicit knowledge, this change has been very constructive and has forged stronger working relationships between two organisations.

Cllr Griffiths supported the actions the Council has taken and was very happy with the report.

The Chairman thanked the team for their work.

40 **CLIMATE CHANGE**

M Gaynor introduced the Climate Change report and asked Committee if there were any questions.

Cllr England thanked Officers for the report and stated that APSE were credible so it makes sense to work with them. He asked how we can encourage community buy in and that perhaps Scope three isn't wide enough. M Gaynor said that Scope 3 was largely from assets out of our direct control and included our 10,000+ Council homes and other leased properties and the target was now aligned to the national target of 2050 though we will make efforts to achieve this earlier. The 2050 aim for the Borough as a whole t will take a combination of ways to reach our goals but it is something that local people can get involved in. There will also need to be some

stimulation from Government. We will be dramatically improving the website to the degree which will facilitate engagement from interested groups and everyday people.

Cllr England commented that the changes to the website are good, but in the last year he was unable to recall any messages preparing people for this. Cllr England asked what else is planned that will change perceptions and habits. M Gaynor replied that the report is headline terms only and there had been consistent coverage of the Council's work on sustainability. We've also recently appointed a Climate Change Officer, who will be looking at the website and explore direct communication, involvement and improvement as a priority.

Cllr England urged Officers and Portfolio Holders that our response needs to be far more than just the web, the Council needs to have authoritative leadership messages. M Gaynor advised that we could do this now that we have got a baseline, a trusted source of information which we aim to use.

Cllr Bassadone mentioned heating sources and asked if we were still putting in boilers. M Gaynor advised the government has already stipulated that you can't put gas services into new properties from 2025. There is roughly 9,000 council properties that are gas heated and there isn't another credible source that can be used at the moment. Air/ground source heat pump companies only have capacity for 27,000 homes per year, electric systems are 30% dearer to install and are not as efficient, we will be looking at alternatives as they become available, but it's unlikely we'll be able to shift away from gas for some time. F Williamson added that mixed/hydrogen boilers are in production which are capable of being replaced with full hydrogen, we can only work with what's available on the market. Boiler replacements all meet A or A+ ratings so we are improving our position. There is also a shift towards district heating systems but primarily on new sites as issues with ownership and infrastructure make retrofitting more difficult.

Cllr Freedman asked if the Climate Change Officer will be introduced to Members. M Gaynor confirmed that would be okay, many Members will know her as it's Melanie Parr and she will start work in July, she will be working very closely with the Corporate Working Group and himself, Mark Brookes and Ben Hosier.

Cllr Freedman mentioned that it's vitally important that we create a means by which we can have 2 way communication, we need to think about the most effective way to communicate with interested groups. M Gaynor advised this will be developed.

Cllr Mahmood said that he had visited Frankfurt in the past and they have district energy systems which save 50% on energy, if the infrastructure was in place we can only influence 15% of the housing market but we can educate the rest. Cllr Mahmood also mentioned that he would like to include as far as reasonably practical on some items as we need to be more realistic. M Gaynor confirmed that scope 1 and 2 was within our influence and was achievable by 2030 by investment and offsetting, we do have some authority on private but that's through planning on new housing. M Gaynor added that we will need government intervention with a new green deal.

Cllr Pringle did not feel that it would be a good idea to include as far as reasonably practical, this implies that we are only paying lip service. All Members had agreed that this was a climate emergency and we need all community engagement options to be fully explored, including incentives like giving trees away, which will get people

talking. M Gaynor said this would be absolutely essential and it will be a key part as it is vital, this will be fed back to Cabinet.

Cllr England asked the date APSE were appointed. M Gaynor advised it was probably about 2 ½ to 3 months ago.

Cllr England enquired how many months after we declared an emergency. M Gaynor said around 9 months.

Cllr England mentioned that we can't do 1,000 home improvements per year because of the bottleneck, so have we contacted MP's or the Secretary of State. M Gaynor confirmed that the costs would be £20-30k per property and we would need the logistics of how this would be managed. F Williamson added that we have to try to balance investment as we would have to reduce expenditure elsewhere. M Gaynor said that we need to be realistic but that it could be quicker if new alternative heating is developed and manufactured in sufficient quantities.

Cllr England said the report says that the costs of not acting will be greater than not acting and this needs to be at the forefront. The LGA recommends any no regrets measures should be done as soon as possible and asked what the Council are able to do straight away. M Gaynor agreed with the statement but we have to take account of technological availability, he added that there are some quick wins like tree planting and encouraging public ownership.

Cllr Hollinghurst advised that he would like to see more ambition to get the Government motivated to increase electricity supply by engaging with them more robustly, switching from fossil fuels to more energy efficient supplies particularly wind power, urging for a quick fix on transport and long term beefing up of the fabric of housing. M Gaynor advised that there needs to be some reality about what the country generates, it's not that it can't be done but it remains a constraint, it would need a change in approach, which is not currently on the agenda.

Cllr Freedman suggested that we work with the County Council to develop and promote cycling routes throughout the Borough. M Gaynor confirmed that is included in the Strategy and that we are already working with the County Council on walking and cycling routes, plus it's a prerequisite in new developments.

Cllr England stated that we haven't got time to do this perfectly and we can't make optimal financial decisions, if we are to keep residents safe from climate change we need to make some urgent changes, he added that he would urge Officers and Portfolio Holders to use reserves and put a serious amount, £100,000, of the budget into this so that the Council can act and recommend this to Cabinet in order to make some progress.

Cllr Griffiths said that the reserves are not just sitting there and that every penny has been set aside for something, it's because we have been prudent that we are able to help now in the current situation.

Cllr England agreed about the reserves but confirmed that his point was that we have already lost a year and that we need to be in a state of readiness and this Committee should put the idea of using the reserves to Cabinet.

Cllr Mahmood said that the report needs to address the wider issue of the climate emergency, which is important but so is delivering all the other services and it will take time to make changes, also to keep other priorities in focus. Cllr Mahmood added that he would like to see more financial implications included.

The Chairman echoed Cllr Mahmood's concern around other priorities and said that services can't be put to one side.

41 **WORK PROGRAMME**

Cllr England requested that Climate Change was a standing item on the agenda, this request was supported by a number of Councillors. There was some discussion around whether it was within this committee's remit and whether the impact of Climate Change on services should be included in every report that comes to Committee, the Chairman confirmed Members could email her, she would discuss with Officers before a decision was made and come back with a sensible timetable.

Action: the Chairman

The Meeting ended at 9.40 pm