

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

16 JUNE 2020

Present:

Members, Councillors:

Barrett
Beauchamp
Birnie (Chairman)
Hobson
Ransley
Riddick
Rogers
Silwal (Vice-
Chairman)
Stevens
Taylor
Timmis
Woolner

Officers:

James Doe	Assistant Director - Planning, Development and Regeneration
Mark Gaynor	Corporate Director - Housing & Regeneration
Fiona Jump	Group Manager - Financial Services
Ben Stevens	ASB Officer
Craig Thorpe	Group Manager - Environmental Services
Emma Walker	Group Manager - Environmental and Community Protection
Sara Whelan	Group Manager - Development Management and Planning

Also in Attendance:

Graham Sutton	Portfolio Holder Planning & Infrastructure
Alan Anderson	Portfolio Holder Environmental Services
Julie Banks	Portfolio Holder Community & Regulatory Services
Cllr Andrew Williams	Leader of the Council
Cllr Adrian England	
Farida Hussain	Group Manager (Legal and Corporate Services)
Mark Brookes	Assistant Director (Corporate and Contracted Services)
Sharon Burr	Corporate & Democratic Support Officer (Minutes)

The meeting began at 18:30

91 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed

92 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies.

93 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

94 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

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

None.

The Chairman advised that he would be rescheduling item 11 to the July meeting. Item 10 would be presented after Item 8 as they were from the same team and this would allow the officers attending only for these Reports to leave the meeting after their items. The minutes have been presented in numerical order.

96 **BUDGET MONITORING Q4**

F Jump presented the report. FJ explained that this is provisional as there are some items to be finalised as we move towards the external audit. FJ added that in terms of what is presented before the committee on the revenue side overall there is a balanced position and in terms of the position for Strategic Planning and Environment, there was an overspend of 872k at the end of the financial year. Questions were invited.

Cllr Silwal asked a question regarding the replacement of the waste fleet, has the rolling programme completed and are the vehicles now being utilised?

Cllr Birnie suggested that a written reply to this question would be acceptable and FJ said that she would send an email out to Cllr Silwal, who was happy with this outcome. **** Action point FJ**

Cllr Birnie asked a question regarding page 4 item 3.4 about a retention of £491,000 not finalised and he asked if it was finalised now?

FJ confirmed that the surplus had been achieved and that an additional surplus is anticipated, she said that the Government does not need to confirm it.

The report was noted.

CT Presented this report and confirmed that he would send out details of vehicles purchased etc.** **Action Point CT**

CT said that in terms of reacting to Covid 19, in March over 80 staff were asked to complete a survey regarding this and as a result 25 were sent home. He confirmed that some members of staff had contracted Covid. New staff were recruited and measures put in place to keep staff safe.

Parking Wardens were utilised to deliver letters explaining that there was difficulty gaining access to some bins. He said that the general public had been generous with praise and support. Supported waste collections were prioritised. Shifts were staggered with starts at 6:30 am and 7 am to help with social distancing and staff parking was reconfigured. An additional 8 vehicles from other services have been brought into use.

In CSG the same survey process was used and 20 members of staff were found to be vulnerable.

Trees and Woodlands have been largely unaffected, although there has been an increase in the number of overgrown trees reported.

Fleet Services have 50% of staff identified as vulnerable and therefore unable to come into work. This has made the maintenance of vehicles challenging but it has continued.

The Environmental Health Awareness Team have been assisting on the admin side. Duties have included hiring in temporary members of staff, making sure that access to roads for the vehicles is clear and disposing of PPE.

Cllr Birnie congratulated the department on its performance and in putting levels of protection in place.

Cllr Timmis commented on the maintenance of hedges and verges saying that in rural areas they are appreciative that more wild flowers have been left uncut and she asked if there was any chance of the council planting wild flowers. Cllr Timmis also wanted to know with whom the responsibility for hedges lay.

CT replied that we are responsible for cutting some hedges and said that he would send a list of areas to the committee. He added that wild flower planting is already in use on the roundabouts and confirmed that they would be looking to extend this to other areas as part of climate change policy and increased bio-diversity.

Cllr Beauchamp asked when public toilets would be open.

CT said that he would speak to Assets and pass the answer on. ** **Action Point CT**

Cllr Beauchamp observed that he has seen the really good one way system that has been introduced in Marlowes and in the Town which seems to be working effectively and he asked if this could mean it would be a good time to open the walled garden.

CT replied that HCC had set up the systems in the town and they did seem to work well, and open spaces were being re-opened. He pointed out that the walled garden only has one exit/entrance, but this could be looked into and he would let Cllr Beauchamp know. ** **Action Point CT**

Cllr Riddick said that the approaches to the town are neat and tidy but the hedges on St Albans Road from Breakspear all the way down are overgrown and wanted to know if they are due to be addressed. He also asked whether, when roundabouts are sponsored, we do the work and charge for it.

CT said that roundabouts are sponsored by a number of businesses and charged different amounts according to the work required, which we do for them. He added that hedges are cut twice a year in accordance with traffic management needs and

this incurs a cost. They would have been done in December and CT will check when they are due again. **** Action Point CT**

Cllr Anderson said that it can be complicated to find out who is responsible for hedges and verges. We do work for the County Council, but in rural areas it tends to be done by County directly so problems need to be reported to them in the first instance. He added that wildflowers was a commitment of the council's administration that we would increase bio diversity in the borough. Although we are keen to promote wildflower areas, this has to be balanced so that the areas do not look untidy. He pointed out that the Walled garden was closed following a police request so we have to wait for them to say that it is ok to open.

Cllr Silwal asked a question about the status of staff that CT had said were off work. CT explained that 32 are still off at the moment, and legal advice was being taken about bringing staff back to work. He confirmed that there is ongoing work on this and ensuring measures are taken to keep staff safe.

The report was noted.

98 **ENVIRONMENTAL & COMMUNITY PROTECTION Q4** **PERFORMANCE REPORT**

EW presented the report and highlighted that all indicators were green. She added that Paul Coates, an Environment Enforcement Officer has won an Excellence in Enforcement Award and the team are very proud he has been recognised for this work.

Cllr Timmis congratulated the team on having so many greens indicators. Cllr Timmis noted that Fly Tips in the results up to March were 699 and 637 were reported and visited within 3 days. She asked if that was an increase and if so how much is this costing the council in clearing up.

EW said that Ben Stevens has more details which will be provided later. The figures show a slight decrease and the number visited has increased. EW told Cllr Timmis she will find out the cost and pass the information on to her. **** Action Point EW**

Cllr Birnie asked if the fly tip officers inspect bin stores in flats, and EW replied that would normally be dealt with by housing.

Cllr Riddick added his congratulations to Paul Coates.

Cllr Hobson asked that, with regard to Covid 19, groups have been seen close together so how many enforcements have the team had to do and how many PSPO's have been served for anti-social behaviour and littering.

EW explained that her team were responsible for business premises enforcement and helping these to be Covid secure. Individuals in parks etc falls to police working with anti -social housing officers. She added that she did not have litter figures with her but would get them for her. **** Action Point EW**

JB asked whether on Page 23 – 40 enforcements include those identified in item 3 or whether are they are just examples.

EW replied that 40 include letters, interviews fixed penalties etc., so they are where we have taken action. Items under point 3 are enforcement, so they are separate teams.

Report noted.

99 **PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION Q4** **PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Sara Whelan presented the report.

SW explained that in terms of planning income we have underachieved by £100K but received two major applications in April, which will help. Land Charges are down by 38K and there has been a dramatic reduction in work due to the housing market being closed as a result of lockdown. Building Control was transferred to Hertfordshire Building Control in mid-December so the accounts are now effectively closed and balanced and Hertfordshire Building Control will be reported on separately in future.

Development Management Performance indicators were predominantly red. This is mostly due to the backlog that was created when the system moved from the Accolade software to Uniform.

A lot of the backlog has been worked through now.

Cllr Timmis asked about Building Control transferred and no data coming through – is it working?

Cllr Birnie said that it had been agreed that there would be periodic reports on that after transfer.

SW said that the consortium is up and running and will be the subject of a separate report.

Cllr Birnie gave his congratulations on appeals success but said he was bothered by the number of red KPI's. He asked why when applications are down is determination within 13 days only 45 percent achieved instead of the target, which is 60 percent.

SW said that it was major applications that he was referring to and most of these are usually extended through an agreement with the applicant. Figures are down as those extensions of time are not yet in place.

Cllr Birnie said that on enforcement there is a reference to categories 2 and 3 for enforcement visits but no percentages are given. He requested an email with those percentages.

SW agreed. **** Action Point SW**

Cllr Birnie said that in all of these target failures one of the mitigations put forward is the IT system. He asked how long this is to go on and would training of officers help

SW said that they have worked through this and the backlog is now worked through, so we should not see this again. Trapeze uses lots of power on our server.

The report was noted with the caveat that the committee is disappointed with the number of red KPI's.

100 ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT

Ben Stevens presented the report. BS explained that there have been changes to the team structure - it was 3 officers and was part of a larger team including anti social behaviour officers. The restructure moved the team under Dawn Rhoden, and it now consists of 2 permanent environment enforcement officers, one temporary and one lead.

Cllr Birnie congratulated the department for exceeding the Herts average in fines and costs recovered.

Cllr Riddick observed that out of all the abandoned vehicles only 46 were removed and destroyed and asked if we do we try and trace registered owners so we can bill for removal? He also asked whether the money issued for fines comes back to us or goes elsewhere.

BS explained that we can issue fixed penalty notices or prosecute, but it is very difficult to trace the owner and hard to prove if they deny it as the DVL database is

outdated. He added that Enforcement fines awarded to the council go into a general government pot for reducing crime but costs come back to the council.

Cllr Timmis said she had heard that there is a fund set up to help support farmers on fly tipping on their land and that she thought that was an excellent move as it is unfair that they have to pay for that. Cllr Timmis asked if there were any anti fly tipping signs available and said that she had bought some and local parish council had put them up in lanes. Cllr Timmis added that she felt the use of cameras would be advantageous in some of the busier lanes.

Cllr Rogers – congratulated BS and his department on making Dacorum a much better place to live.

Cllr Hobson said that her question was probably better answered in writing as she wanted to know if we could have an idea how much it is costing the Council to issue under 30 notices and how many fines are actually recovered, in addition to the cost to chase these matters up in court.

BS confirmed he would answer in writing, copying the committee. **** Action Point BS**

Cllr Beauchamp said that the number Section 7 Public Space Protection orders enforcements are very low and he wanted to know what they were actually given for, as he is particularly concerned about the danger from cyclists to the public in pedestrianised areas. Cllr Beauchamp felt that the cost of enforcement was money well spent if it helps to protect the public

BS said he would answer in email. **** Action Point BS**

Cllr Birnie asked BS to explain the burning nuisance that they deal with.

BS said that his team dealt with commercial waste being burnt in public places.

The report was noted

101 FOOD SERVICE PLAN - DEFERRED - NOW ON JULY AGENDA

102 CLIMATE CHANGE

Mark Gaynor presented the report.

MG told the committee that an appointment had been made for the post of Emergency and Sustainability Officer and the person appointed was Melanie Carr who is known to some as she works in Environmental Services at present.

MG explained that the report, which went to Cabinet in May, is referred to this Committee to review and comment on the developing strategy and action plan. He said that the plan is and will be evidence based and it's got a credible baseline on emissions with the ability to monitor progress in reductions of CO2 over time. MG added that the officers had worked with the Association for Public Section Excellence, who have a specialist arm for energy and the climate.

MG said that the Strategy isn't fixed but will be refined and adapted over time. Working with APSE, training and workshops for members and staff will be provided in the near future. He said that there has been a Corporate Officer Group in place for some time working on the subject. The work that has been done shows that the Council can get to 0 carbon by 2030 for Scopes 1 and 2. These are the Scopes that result directly from the Council's actions and service delivery and the reality is council housing forms the vast majority of the Council's overall emissions; namely, over 87 percent. We don't control how tenants use energy. For this reason the Report notes that achieving the goal will take longer than the 2030 deadline. The reasons for this are contained in the report and the Strategy and Action plan also concerns itself with sustainability and bio-diversity as linked issues. The report refers to actions already

delivered over a number of years. MG added that one thing we have not done so much work on but that will be a priority is how we engage with the community and interest groups and it is important that we have a clear communication strategy and this will be part of actions going forward. The Action Plan is in draft. It is not fixed in stone.

Cllr Ransley said that she was really pleased to see a report. She said that some communities have already made a good start on communication with residents, so it would be good if some of the things already done were picked up on and that a Town and Parish conference for clerks and members would be very useful.

MG replied that there is a lot of further work to be done on communication with residents and communities. Covid has slowed it down, it is key and we want to work with groups to assist where we can. A separate Town and Parish Conference would probably be warranted, rather than the annual conference. We need to talk to a range of people to get different views.

Cllr Timmis said that she was pleased that climate change was being given this priority but did not see anything about electric car points in the report. She also said new housing developments should not be using gas boilers but more sustainable type of heating and another issue not mentioned is recycling of waste as a power source within our own borough.

Cllr Birnie said that charging points for cars are being dealt with in the new Local Plan.

MG agreed that recycling of waste as a power source was not really mentioned in this report. As far as electric power points are concerned, developers are starting to put them in as they realise they are a good selling point. There is very extensive coverage of this in the local plan which will be setting the standards. We will push to meet energy efficiency and other factors like that, but there is a limit to the degree to which we can require new homes to comply. Those things will be considered and there will be a separate part which will look specifically at the climate change policies within the Local Plan. There is also a task and finish group working on the local plan and there is member involvement in that. All points will be considered and the issue of power generation will be covered.

Cllr Hobson said it was good to see the report but it was agreed at Council that there is a climate emergency and she regretted that the report is only coming out a year later. She added that this is for the benefit of all in the future and that she is really keen that Dacorum is seen as a leading light and press coverage would be great. Hemel Hempstead does not have town or parish councils so borough councillors are very keen to help and have good links with the community. So community involvement does not have to fall exclusively on officers. Businesses can also take a leading role in this.

MG said that he accepted the point of time taken and that a lot of actions that will be taken are not short term. So such actions can start quickly, but the results will take time to show. For example, technology is changing and new homes are not allowed gas boilers so industry must provide better alternatives. He welcomed the statement that members have a big role to play and said that they are working with Hemel Hempstead business ambassadors, covering more than just Hemel Hempstead and also with business group dealing with climate change.

Cllr Hobson agreed that we can't do everything tomorrow but we can make very firm commitments that we will change things and what our intention is.

Cllr Beauchamp asked that if homes should meet maximum green standard was this new homes only, council properties or all homes?

MG replied that as far as new homes are concerned there is likely to be a future home standard through building control which would be set to a target significantly above current arrangements may be able to go further. In terms of council housing, the commitment is to over time get it zero carbon. Issues about alternative heating sources and there is reference to that in the report. In the private sector we have authority over private rented and they will have to achieve the energy certificates. This will not be an easy task. With owner occupier properties we need to make a new green deal with utility providers and the government. The shift is towards greener homes

Cllr Beauchamp observed that private homes will probably have to have some kind of encouragement.

MG agreed that we will have to look to have some resource to assist.

Cllr Taylor asked if it would be possible to make commercial premises display their energy certificates in entrances and doors. He said that he had a question relating to electricity supply various estimates on demand on grid most say would need to double capacity and wanted to know what evidence there was to support that statement.

MG said that we could make commercial premises display if we are the owners but he said he doesn't think that we have any control apart from health and safety notices over what they would have to display

In terms of electricity there are a number of sources that would confirm that if we shift to a position where the current vehicle fleet changes to electric, the strain on the grid would be massive. Other solutions are also electric and over time they will require a shift in how we generate energy. This may involve carbon capture or more likely wind and solar power and other techniques. There will need to be other pushes to generate energy in a way which does not use fossil fuels.

Cllr Taylor – asked whether the use of vehicle to grid technology had been considered.

MG replied that it was a developing technology and full advantage would be taken from it if it comes in.

There was a discussion around other solutions to replace gas power and MG said that these systems work best with new developments.

Cllr Taylor said that the report mentions the shift towards walking cycling etc and asked how should we go about getting better cycle paths in the wards.

MG replied that with new developments we want to make sure there is greater emphasis on this. Hemel Garden Communities is an example. There is an opportunity to improve the existing network in partnership with the County Council.

Cllr Birnie said that the Council should not be entirely wedded to one kind of technology, such as electric vehicles. For example there is work being done to reduce the cost of Hydrogen as an alternative fuel source using off shore wind at power demand down time. He offered to share his research in this area. Cllr Taylor and MG accepted this offer.

Cllr Woolner gave thanks for the report and said that it was good to go forwards as fast as possible. She asked whether, as the report mentions the willingness of developers to co-operate, there is a mechanism that could be used to force them to use the best technology going forward.

MG said that the strongest possibilities lie with building control and local planning. Better developers will see a market niche, as some things are relatively cheap to do.

Cllr Ransley asked if a solar panel club with council leading was feasible so that we could encourage private owners and Landlords to install panels that would cut down on energy use and show that we are taking a lead.

MG replied that solar panels are good for water heating. As a local authority it would be difficult to operate as a business, or recommend companies. When the government gives action on what it intends to do to improve energy and sustainability across the housing stock, solar will probably be part of that and we can promote, provide information and encourage.

Cllr Beauchamp said that blind and elderly residents are worried about the potential for mixed cycle and footpaths. He said that he believed we are looking to ensure adequate demarcation and we need to ensure this does happen.

MG completely agreed that good demarcation is essential.

Cllr Anderson said that he would like to answer an earlier question regarding energy from burning refuse. There is not enough in Dacorum to make this viable. Also the County Council is having difficulty in procuring a site. He added that regarding the report, it is early days and as MG has said, it is flexible and there will be new ideas etc as time moves on. We want to look at future reusable energy sources, but everything has to be

Cllr Woolner asked if community engagement such as competitions with schools could be run in the autumn.

MG explained that Melanie already does this with waste and so would be interested in this.

MG said that issues with trees had been mentioned and confirmed that there were plans for 4,200 to be planted largely in Gadebridge Park. Proposals within the Local Plan will be looking for more than 1 tree to replace any taken down for development. Trees have an important impact long term.

Cllr Birnie remarked that APSE appeared to be well priced for the work they had done and wondered what the Council got for the money.

MG replied that there are a variety of different things they are looking at and doing for the council.

Cllr Birnie asked about the cost of becoming carbon neutral for scope 1 and 2.

MG said that there will be a degree of offsetting which has to be done in a way which is genuine, verifiable and preferably local. The degree to which it would be required is relatively small in scopes 1 and 2.

Cllr Birnie asked if there was any future in enterprises such as solar powered farms?

MG agree that they produce energy at low cost, but daylight hours are not times of peak demand and improvements to batteries would make a huge difference.

ITEM 12 CONCLUSIONS

The Committee;

1. Welcomes the report as the basis for a climate change strategy action plan.
2. Approves of the proposed £75K budget in para 4.6 page 85 and of those to whom it is proposed that expenditure from this budget should be delegated.
3. Suggests that further work needs to be done to identify land for tree planting and possibly solar panel installations.
4. Urges DBC to lobby central government to allow requisite work on the housing stock to be at least partly offset by rent increases.

There being no other comments, Cllr Birnie thanked officers and the Committee for their time.

The Meeting ended at 21:10. Next meeting scheduled for July 28 2020