



Public Document Pack Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Agenda

Scrutiny making a positive difference: Member led and independent, Overview & Scrutiny Committee promote service improvements, influence policy development & hold Executive to account for the benefit of the Community of Dacorum

Wednesday 21 July 2021 at 7.30 pm

The Councillors listed below are requested to attend the above meeting, on the day and at the time and place stated, to consider the business set out in this agenda.

Membership

Councillor Harden
Councillor Adeleke (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Bassadone
Councillor Imarni (Chairman)
Councillor Mahmood
Councillor Pringle
Councillor Durrant

Councillor Johnson
Councillor Oguchi
Councillor Hollinghurst
Councillor Barry
Councillor Freedman
Councillor Tindall

For further information, please contact Corporate and Democratic Support

AGENDA

1. MINUTES (Pages 3 - 14)

To confirm the minutes from the previous meeting

2. PART 2 MINUTES (Pages 15 - 18)

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive any apologies for absence

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To receive any declarations of interest

A member with a disclosable pecuniary interest or a personal interest in a matter who

attends a meeting of the authority at which the matter is considered -

- (i) must disclose the interest at the start of the meeting or when the interest becomes apparent

and, if the interest is a disclosable pecuniary interest, or a personal interest which is also prejudicial

- (ii) may not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter (and must withdraw to the public seating area) unless they have been granted a dispensation.

A member who discloses at a meeting a disclosable pecuniary interest which is not registered in the Members' Register of Interests, or is not the subject of a pending notification, must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days of the disclosure.

Disclosable pecuniary interests, personal and prejudicial interests are defined in Part 2 of the Code of Conduct For Members

[If a member is in any doubt as to whether they have an interest which should be declared they should seek the advice of the Monitoring Officer before the start of the meeting]

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

An opportunity for members of the public to make statements or ask questions in accordance with the rules as to public participation

6. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN

7. THE ELMS CONTRACT (Pages 19 - 38)

8. SYRIAN REFUGEES (Pages 39 - 46)

9. ACTION POINTS (Pages 47 - 52)

10. WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 53 - 56)

MINUTES

HOUSING & COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 JUNE 2021

Present:

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Cllr Adeleke (Vice-Chairman) | Cllr Imarni (Chair) |
| Cllr Banks | Cllr Johnson |
| Cllr Durrant | Cllr Suqlain Mahmood |
| Cllr Freedman | Cllr Oguchi |
| Cllr Harden | Cllr Pringle |
| Cllr Hollinghurst | Cllr Ransley |

Officers:

| | |
|--------------|---|
| N. Beresford | Group Manager – Strategic Housing |
| L. Warden | Group Manager - Communities |
| M. Rawdon | Group Manager – People & Performance |
| O. Jackson | Group Manager – Tenants & Leaseholders |
| S. Turner | PA to the Corporate Directors (Minutes) |

Also Present:

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Councillor Griffiths | Portfolio Holder for Housing |
| Councillor Banks | Portfolio Holder for Community and Regulatory Services |

The meeting began at 7.30 pm.

HC/021/21 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2021 were agreed by the members present.

HC/022/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Ransley is substituting for Councillor Tindall. N. Beresford is substituting for F. Williamson. Councillor Bassadone and Mark Gaynor sent their apologies.

HC/023/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Harden advised that there was a report that mentions South Hill Centre as a partner that is working with the Council and he informed the Committee that he is an employee of South Hill Centre.

HC/024/21 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation..

HC/025/21 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO A CALL-IN

None.

HC/026/21 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2020/21

Councillor Pringle wished to make a point of order regarding a comment made by Councillor Durrant. The Chair wanted to obtain some advice as there was not a Legal representative at the meeting. The Chair was advised that the matter needs to be referred to Member Support. The Chair will report back to Councillor Pringle.

Action: The Chair to report back to Councillor Pringle regarding the advice obtained in relation to the comment made by Councillor Durrant.

Councillor Mahmood explained to the Chair what had happened. Councillor Pringle wanted it recorded that she took offence to the comment.

Fiona Jump introduced the report and explained that it is provisional because it is subject to the final External Audit process which is due to commence in July. F. Jump summarised the position of the General Rate Fund and the recommendation to Cabinet that the £2.4m is supported from the Economy Recovery Reserve created to deal with the implications arising from the Pandemic.

F. Jump also summarised the position as per the report on the Housing Revenue Account budgets, Capital Schemes slippage, Garage Developments at Northend and Westerdale.

F. Jump asked for any questions.

Councillor Freedman firstly wished to congratulate Fiona and her team for the report. Councillor Freedman wished to point out that there was a slightly misleading policy with regard to the Depreciation Charge. The Depreciation Charge has an increased charge due to the properties being revalued however, the book value falls under a different Committee. If this was removed the challenge would turn into a surplus. Councillor Freedman feels to imply that the Housing Revenue Account needs to raise more revenue in order to account for the fact the properties have appreciated passively and feels this is wrong for this Scrutiny Committee.

F. Jump responded that the way that the Depreciation is accounted for is dictated by the Industry Code of Practice which is followed clearly. F. Jump is happy to deal with this outside of the meeting as it is very technical in nature and feels the points do need looking into to ensure that things are done in an appropriate way.

Councillor Freedman's wished to make a suggestion regarding the expected slippage and noted that most of the slippage was well described in the report, but asked if there was any scope to deliver a contingency and change the way that slippage is reported.

F. Jump replied that with any forecast a view is taken at a point in time and attempt to give in the report what is felt to be the most accurate assessment around slippage but there will always be sensitivities and unknowns around this. F. Jump will look into how best to present movements around slippage in the report in a way that is meaningful to Members.

Councillor Adeleke asked a question regarding point 5.2 of the report and whether it is known where the £362k, which has been recorded as surplus and transferred to Revenue Reserve for Capital requirements, will be spent as it is ring fenced in HRA.

F. Jump responded that where there is surplus on HRA those funds are clearly earmarked for the HRA and cannot be taken for use on any General Fund purposes. The recommendation has been to transfer any surplus at year end to a Revenue Reserve as this provides flexibility on how it can be used in the future. At the moment there is not a particular purpose for that reserve but there may well be. If the funds are sitting within a Revenue Reserve they can be applied to either Revenue or Capital projects but would have to be HRA in nature.

Councillor Adeleke asked a question regarding point 5.11 of the report and if the surplus of £433k would fall into the same category.

F. Jump responded that the £433k is part of the budgeted amount that is expected to be transferred in from Reserves and was specifically to fund an upfront Pensions Contributions payment. With the financial performance of the HRA there was no need to make that draw down from Reserves as it could be funded by surplus generated in year. The £433k was the expected position that was intended would have to be adopted when the budget was set but by the end of the financial year this was not required.

Councillor Adeleke asked what the balance is regarding the reserve of £581k for Covid-19 Hardship Reserve reported in 7.4 of the report.

F. Jump provided some further explanation of that reserve. Around £1m of funding was received from the Government to support the most vulnerable of the Council Tax payers. During the year around £600k of the support was distributed and the £581k is the balance remaining from the grant funding. The recommendation is that this is rolled forward into the current financial year 2021/22 to extend that scheme.

Councillor Harden asked for an explanation regarding the General Fund Reserve Summary and the difference between Rent Aid Guarantee Scheme and Rent Guaranteed Scheme Reserve.

F. Jump replied that they are both used for a very similar purpose and N. Beresford provided further explanation. Both budgets are set within the Private Sector Housing team and relate to previous deposit guarantee schemes that were won by DBC regarding a Help To Rent Scheme and was phased out when the Private Sector Housing Regulatory Services transferred into the Housing

Service and the Rent Aid Scheme relates to a Deposit Guarantee Scheme which is run by DENS on DBC behalf.

Councillor Harden asked what the route is to be able to access the Dacorum Rent Aid.

N. Beresford responded that the pathway for all homeless clients is a single homeless pathway that is an initial personalised housing plan that is developed by the Homeless Prevention team which will include a referral onto DENS, as any clients that are accommodated at The Elms and are then suitable to move on into private sector housing would then qualify for a Deposit Guarantee through Rent Aid Programme which is where the Guarantee Deposit is held.

Councillor Barry asked for more information regarding the underspend on the Garage Developments at Westerdale.

F. Jump replied that she does not have full details but is aware that there tends to be a contingency built in on these projects and feels that it is this contingency that was not spent.

Councillor Mahmood asked questions regarding 5.6 and 5.9, and the £3.7m that has not been spent on maintenance and repairs and the depreciation of £2.75m and wondered if there was an accounting reason for this.

F. Jump replied that there is a link in a sense in that the value of a property will depend on its maintenance but regarding the transactions that have passed through the account there is not a fix relating to the two figures, they are derived separately. The depreciation is calculated based on the information provided the External Valuers and independent of any work undertaken and gives the idea of the usage of the property.

Councillor Pringle said she was concerned about the management of the Garages as some residents have reported to her what they are experiencing as mis-management of some empty garages which are being used for anti-social behaviour.

F. Jump advised that the relevant Officer who looks after that area was not at this meeting but she was able to provide some in-sight. A lot of work has been carried out regarding identifying where investment is required, this includes demand & the works required. This programme of works has started and steps are being taken to address the concerns.

M. Rawdon also advised that there is an item going to the next Scrutiny meeting regarding the Garage Project Presentation.

The Chair advised that there were some microphones that were out of range and people should be sitting between the tape marks and also only two microphones can be pressed at any one time so please show hands.

HC/027/21 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT - HOUSING LANDLORD

N. Beresford presented the report for Q4 20/21 Housing Landlords. N. Beresford advised that the KPI outturn is contained in Appendix A and the Service Plan and Risk Register is contained in Appendix B. The Government Roadmap is continually reviewed and has enabled the Service delivery. Most of the Services within Housing have continued to be delivered remotely throughout the last 12 month period but there have been some exceptions with regard to face to face homeless interviews and outreach services being provided. Site visits have been undertaken by key officers based within the Private Sector Housing service and the Council's Property & Place team. Sheltered Housing Officers are back on-site.

N. Beresford advised the performance highlights within the report. The Private Sector Housing team were successful in preventing illegal evictions, the increase in licensed HMOs within the Borough, the increase in production of the overall key to key time, the increase in households that have being supported within Temporary Accommodation by the Welfare Sustainment team which is a reflection of the continued pressure within the Homeless service this year and the Gas Compliance.

There has been a real success within the service in the Outturn Performance in relation to arrears, 3.9% of rent due which is an improvement on the proposed target of 5%. In relation to an increase in Rough Sleeping and associated street activity and anti-social behaviour there is a continued effort with cross-service work between Community Safety teams, Homelessness and external partners.

The Development team have been successful in receiving a further award for Corn Mill Court development.

N. Beresford highlighted the performance challenges in respect to the Osbourne contract, letting of sheltered housing stock and Lifeline contract.

N. Beresford asked for any questions.

Councillor Johnson asked what stage the Sheltered Housing Review is currently at.

O. Jackson replied that the Review has identified a number of schemes based on design layout, provision of amenities, proximity to local services and demand. Discussions have taken place with the Development team in terms of looking at initial feasibility studies to consider options. With regard to the other 29 schemes investment opportunities are being looked at to raise the standard of the buildings to bring them in-line with today's requirements.

Councillor Freedman asked for an overview with regard to restrictions on evictions due to Covid and how people are affected.

N. Beresford replied that there are around 117 households that we were working with at the end of April and at the current time this has been reduced to around 80. The remaining households will be supported either into alternative private sector accommodation or there will be ongoing negotiation with their existing landlords but there are 28 households that will become homeless due to their landlords needing to move back into their properties. These households are a primary focus to resolve their housing situation to prevent

them coming into temporary accommodation. The remaining families are being considered under the Reconsideration Process by the County Court process with the landlord being supported to re-apply for possession of their property and the earliest that these households are likely to go through this process is October 2021. There is currently a shortage within Dacorum area of private sector housing accommodation which places pressures on the service but there has been some success in engaging with a number of new partners within the private sector and local letting agents.

Councillor Johnson asked what would be the estimate of the unknown cases.

N. Beresford replied that figures with the clients that we have been working on is representative of what is happening in the local community and the figures have been aligned with Advice Bureau service who saw an 80% rise last year in households experiencing difficulties who have contacted them and a large number have been assisted with hardship measures to enable them to remain in their home. The area that is more difficult to gauge are the households that we are yet to see the impact from but we are expecting an increase demand in homelessness this year. Primarily the expectation is due to the result of other areas in addition to the eviction moratorium and changes in legislation in July.

Councillor Mahmood asked a question regarding Section 2 and non-essential repairs and is it Dacorum or Osbourne who decide on the timing of works.

N. Beresford replied there will be some impact on performance as a result of Covid and the ability to bring back in qualified staff. But in addition the stipulated days within the contract and the requirement to complete voids and works within a specific period of time are laid down. Any amendments would need to be agreed through the Legal and Procurement teams and is subject to the existing contract. The charter is expected to deal with and the addition of the new Client Manager giving a renewed focus on performance.

Councillor Mahmood also asked about Sheltered Housing and alternative use.

N. Beresford replied that everything is proactively being considered. With Covid there were significant increases in demand in respect of homelessness therefore it meant that there was a need to be creative and look at all options in terms of temporary accommodation usage which saw the use of appropriate units of Sheltered Housing Schemes. We are also in the midst of Service Planning which will enable all teams to be creative about options in respect of gaps in resource and areas where there is less demand. Sheltered Housing will be considered for remodelling, redevelopment and the opportunity to consider access to Grant Funding which could enable reclassification of some sites for alternative use.

Councillor Harden asked about the Rough Sleepers during lockdown and was very pleased that everyone was housed, and are we still endorsing the Everyone In Campaign and is there any budget costs for implementation.

N. Beresford replied the Everyone In requirement ended on 17 May along with the changes of the restrictions. Majority of Hertfordshire districts are continuing to accommodate those that were brought into accommodation at that time apart from North Herts District. A number of clients were brought into accommodation and have fallen out of accommodation during that period. 5 -6 individuals have had

placements of accommodation and for varying reasons such as anti-social behaviour etc. have returned to the streets and then have come back into accommodation but this is normal at this time of year. We continue to work with partners to break that repeated cycle. We are retaining everybody that has been brought into accommodation but we are not expected to continue to bring everybody in. We are undertaking to provide an individual assessment of everyone who is at risk of rough sleeping and there is a dedicated team working on this. Dacorum have led the Herts Accommodation Cell in partnership with Stevenage Borough Council and Welwyn Hatfield District. A number of initiatives are being put in place to deter residents from giving money inappropriately. In terms of finances we have spent in excess of £120k tackling single homeless, rough sleeping and bringing households into accommodation during the pandemic.

Councillor Harden asked about the Performance Challenges on page 29, point 3.0 of the report and if there was an expected figure of complaints regarding Osbourne and what was being done to try and reduce the numbers.

N. Beresford replied that she would draw attention to the Partnership Charter which is the focus on the 12 week improvement plan to tackle all aspects of performance and reinforce behaviours that are expected in line with the contract. In respect of the specific target, N. Beresford will feed that back.

Action: N. Beresford to feed back the target regarding complaints in relation to Osbourne.

Councillor Harden asked about if the Partnership Charter 4.0 of the report was available to Members.

Action: N. Beresford replied that she will liaise with J. Grace and distribute it to Members.

Councillor Barry commented on the touch points being installed in the town centre to enable people to donate and that care was needed that this is not just people with mental health issues that don't choose to be homeless it can happen to anyone. Also people may be encouraged to give people food as they may not have their card available to be able to donate.

N. Beresford replied that we have received some challenging behaviour in respect of street activity and her advice would be to encourage those that are either rough sleeping or partaking in street activity to engage with the organisations that are there to support them. The Day Centre is now fully open, DENS Day Centre is fully open, hot meals and access to showers and washing facilities is available and she would encourage residents to signpost to the Day Centre. There are small pockets of community groups who have been out giving meals and hot drinks and it is being aware from a safeguarding and personal safety perspective that even hot drinks can be used as weapons and therefore she would like to discourage residents from giving food. The Tap and Give devices are being done in partnership with Town Centre Management to enable us to identify the charity or organisation that we wish to give the donations to and these will be rotated on a quarterly basis.

Councillor Freedman asked a question regarding the Osbourne contract and is consideration being given if the performance concerns are not turned around in an acceptable time.

N. Beresford replied that we are coming to the end of the current contract and that is something that will be considered. J. Grace will have discussions with F. Williamson, Procurement and Legal teams in respect of the next steps should we need to escalate any contract extension.

Councillor Adeleke asked if there are any numbers available for those that are involved regarding rough sleeping and homelessness.

N. Beresford replied that they are in discussion with Member Support to provide an updated Member Briefing in relation to both homelessness and private sector housing. Currently the number of rough sleepers is 6 on any given night within Dacorum and this figure was taken from a recent Rough Sleep count undertaken by Officers in partnership with Community Safety unit and the Police on 17 May 2021. Homelessness currently there are 143 households in temporary accommodation, of which 3 households are in bed and breakfast and the remaining 140 in varying forms of DBC temporary accommodation. This is a significant increase on the pre-Covid situation where there was round 90 households in temporary accommodation but at this point last year around 179 households in temporary accommodation.

Councillor Griffiths wished to take the opportunity to formally put on record her thanks to everyone in Housing who she feels have stepped up and over the mark to provide a service during the pandemic.

The Chair seconded Councillor Griffiths comments and the speed at which Housing adapted within days to identify the most vulnerable in the community which is a phenomenal achievement when everyone has their own issues to deal with. The Chair said that the whole Committee would like to jointly commend the team.

N. Beresford said she appreciated the comments and thanks and would feed it back to the teams.

The Chair wished as a point of clarity that N. Beresford made it clear about the different groups of homeless people in Dacorum. It is not suggested that it is just people with mental health problems, the Chair has had a personal experience of people who have been housed, one stayed and got into employment and the other who chose voluntarily to return to rough sleeping. It is clear that you have identified these types of people and there are several groups of people who still fall into the homeless category.

N. Beresford replied that not everyone presenting to Dacorum has mental health issues but what we do have is high number of clients presenting with complex needs and this is seen across all Housing services. 50% of clients currently in temporary accommodation have complex needs and these are a range of issues. The Tenancy Sustainment team are currently supporting 220 households.

HC/028/21 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT - COMMUNITIES

L. Warden introduced herself in her new role as Group Manager – Communities and explained we are aware of the existing and future challenges that need to be addressed that are having significant implications on our communities, some are legislation changes, risks, some due to the pandemic. We also have an opportunity to identify partnership working to consider how we can build capacity within our communities. We need structure and resources that are efficient and can meet the objectives to empower the communities to take a more proactive approach and meet current and future challenges. In March L. Warden was appointed to a 12

month secondment to take temporary responsibility for day-to-day services in the Community Partnerships, Community Safety and Children's Services team. Alongside this responsibility L. Warden will be carrying out a review of the provision of community services across the Council. M. Rawdon will continue to be Group Manager for Customer Services, Internal and External Communications, the Old Town Hall and HR.

L. Warden presented the Q4 Performance report for Communities. L. Warden highlighted the performance areas within her Service.

Community Safety Partnership and Children's Services

Adventure Playgrounds have remain closed in Q4 and staff have been involved in other projects and we have been able to allow access to some groups where restrictions have permitted. Continuing to review the guidance to allow re-open sessions.

Community Partnerships

Many online and virtual courses to improve health & wellbeing, loneliness, isolation have been carried out by the team such as Walk Dacorum which was a virtual walking event when a125 people took part and there was very positive feedback.

Healthy Hub

The pandemic has had an impact on the ability to hold in person sessions but there has been an increased presence on social media and increased referrals in Q4 and hoping to build on this further with drop-in sessions.

M. Rawdon presented the remaining report on Customer Services, Old Town Hall and Communications.

The overall performance is a positive one with Customer Services team achieving all of their targets in Q4. The Old Town Hall has worked on training staff to support them ready for the re-opening. Recruitment is taking place. A host of activities and projects have been undertaken by the Communications team.

M. Rawdon asked for any questions.

Councillor Adeleke asked how and who the awards of the Community Grants and Climate Change were decided and why where the Ward Councillors not advised.

L. Warden replied that they are run by different teams and some more information can be obtained with regard to how the grants were administered and who is on the Board.

Action: L. Warden will obtain information regarding Community Grants and Climate Change.

The Community Grant scheme we have here has been run for some time. As a member of different organisations for example there are representatives from Community Action Dacorum that will sit in that, along with representatives from across Dacorum Borough Council including Housing teams, Community Partnership teams to ensure that we identify any bids that are being placed from Community and Voluntary groups with projects that could make a huge impact on the local area.

Each year we focus on a new area for example Climate Emergency. The new window has just been opened for bids and more information will be brought the next Scrutiny Committee regarding the grants that will be allocated in this quarter.

Councillor Harden would like some background around why and the purpose of the Healthy Hub.

L. Warden replied that this is funded by Public Health and there were Grants for different Local Authorities to bid for. They identified a model on approach for each Borough to set up a Healthy Hub and this is to ensure there is a signposting service where individuals can be identified and referred onto a number of different community groups, partners and support agencies that can provide help. Public Health have a few key objectives that wanted to include for example reducing obesity, helping general health outcomes and wellbeing, reducing smoking. DBC have identified what those are within Dacorum which are for example Debt, money advice, mental health support and the Healthy Hub has been created and an Officer has been recruited who will bring all of the agencies and partners together. With the idea that it should provide a variety of drop-in sessions around the Borough but Covid has had an impact on that so things have moved online where possible and has received a lot of referrals. We have gathered some good information on the reasons why people have approached us and which agencies they are being referred to and we can then identify the needs and demands of our residents. Currently we are in the process of reviewing the last year but there is not sufficient information yet to be able to look at the long term plans and we are liaising with Public Health to identify if the funding is likely to be extended beyond April 2022.

Councillor Harden if there was some monitoring going on and what was the requirement from Public Health to measure what they wish to achieve.

L. Warden replied that there was and there are a number of outcomes they are looking to achieve and have numbers and figures they want DBC to provide. At the present time we are providing quarterly reports to understand the individual's needs. With a lot of the projects and activities that are being done within Community Partnership team we may have numbers of people attending but some of the personal outcomes can be very different to report on so it is about trying to find that information and where we can put a value on the improvement that someone has made.

Councillor Freedman asked why the improvement works at the Children's playground at Canal Fields have stopped.

M. Rawdon replied that is does not fall within the Service. We manage the 4 Council Adventure Playgrounds. The open playgrounds are managed by Clean Safe and Green and Matt will ask them to respond.

Action: M Rawdon will ask Clean Safe and Green to respond to Councillor Freedman regarding why the work at stopped at Canal Field playground.

Councillor Freedman asked what was the Council's position was on the Tring Park Run no longer being held at Tring Park.

L. Warden replied that she doesn't have the exact information at the moment. Senior management are aware of this and they have been liaising with The Woodland Trust and Park Run and other teams to look at possible ways that it can

continue as we are supportive of park runs and know the difference they make to bring people who attend and local businesses.

Councillor Mahmood asked about the future plans for re-opening the Old Town Hall.

M. Rawdon replied that some outdoor summer events are being planned to start and will include some children comedies in the park. We are looking to re-open in September for the Autumn production. Recruitment has been delayed but posts are now being filled and training will be undertaken so that they can begin with the outdoor summer events. The normal programme will take place in the Autumn when we have re-opened.

Councillor Mahmood asked whether the arches under the building could be utilised.

M. Rawdon replied that options are being looked at around how the arches can be utilised.

Councillor Hollinghurst asked about the Park Run at Tring Park which is looked after by the Woodland Trust and whether there are any clauses in the contract relating to the use and access of the public that we expect to maintain and develop.

M. Rawdon replied that he is aware that Legal have been involved and looking at the possibility and DBC are providing influence where we can.

Councillor Hollinghurst asked if there was any legal compulsion we can bring to bear on the contract as it is written currently.

M. Rawdon replied that he is hoping that if there was a legal opportunity we would be exploiting it.

Councillor Pringle asked whilst the issue of the children's playground was referred to Clean Safe and Green could the severity of the flooding at Canal Fields also be reported.

M. Rawdon asked if Councillor Pringle could provide the photographs she had received regarding the flooding.

Action: Councillor Pringle to provide photographs of flooding at Canal Fields.

Councillor Ransley asked if a statement or press release could be put out regarding what DBC are doing with regard to the Tring Park Run.

M. Rawdon replied that he will feed that back. L. Warden said there will be discussions with the teams and do what we can to reassure residents.

Chair announced that the next item was a Part II item and asked the member of the public to please leave the meeting for this agenda item.

HC/029/21 WATER CHARGES (PART 11 ITEM)

Full details can be found in Part II Minutes.

HC/030/21 ACTION POINTS

The majority of the action points have been completed. There is one outstanding with Chair which she is having ongoing discussions with M. Gaynor's team with regard to funds for low income households to have green energy. Chair will inform the Committee when it has been updated.

Action: The Chair to provide an update regarding funds being available for low income households to have green energy.

HC/031/21 WORK PROGRAMME

Noted.

The next Committee is due to take place on 21 July 2021.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm.

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AGENDA ITEM:

SUMMARY

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| Report for: | Housing & Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee |
| Date of meeting: | 21st July 2021 |
| PART: | 1 |
| If Part II, reason: | |

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|--------------------------------|---|
| Title of report: | Elms Hostel management contract |
| Contact: | Councillor Margaret Griffiths, Portfolio Holder for Housing Author/Responsible Officer – Fiona Williamson – Assistant Director - Housing |
| Purpose of report: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To provide members with performance information on the management of the Elms Homeless hostel 2. For members to comment upon the proposed contract arrangement for the management of the Elms |
| Recommendations | That the Committee note the Performance Report and approve the proposals for the management of the Elms Homeless hostel. |
| Corporate objectives: | <p>Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need – including Temporary Accommodation</p> <p>Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery</p> |
| Implications: | <p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>The financial implications of the various options have been considered and the budgets are monitored and reported as part of the Monthly Budget Monitoring Meetings with the HRA Financial Accountant. Budget Reporting is quarterly to Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p> |
| 'Value For Money Implications' | <p><u>Value for Money</u></p> <p>The options appraisal considered the value for money assessment of the proposal to award a commissioning contract and informed negotiations with DENS to ensure that Value for Money could continue to be demonstrated.</p> |

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| Risk Implications | The pandemic has resulted in an increased number of homeless individuals and households that have presented to the service and the Elms continues to operate at capacity. Procurement of a new provider during this period would have put additional pressure on the service and diverted resources which would have negatively impacted the response to the pandemic related homeless cases. |
| Equalities Implications | Community Impact Assessments are developed whenever there is a requirement to change or create a new policy or procedure or significant change to service delivery. |
| Health And Safety Implications | Health & Safety is an identified key risk for the Housing Service. |
| Consultees: | Mark Gaynor – Corporate Director, Housing and Regeneration Jason Grace – Group Manager Property and Place Natasha Beresford – Group Manager Strategic Housing Oliver Jackson – Group Manager Tenants and Leaseholders David Barrett – Group Manager, Housing Development Ben Hosier – Group Manager, Procurement and Contracted Services Nigel Howcutt – Assistant Director, Finance and Resources |
| Background papers: | Covid-19 Impact Report, Cabinet, 23 June 2020 |
| Historical background <i>(please give a brief background to this report to enable it to be considered in the right context).</i> | The Elms Hostel, a 44 bed homeless hostel was constructed in 2014 and in 2015, following a tender process, DENS were successful in obtaining the contract to undertake the day to day management and operation of the facility. The original contract was for a period of 5 years, the expiry of which was in 2020 during the pandemic. The report outlines the details of options considered to maintain continuity of service provision during the pandemic and during the recovery phase. |
| Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report and appendices: | DENS – Dacorum Emergency Night Shelter HRS – Housing related support HCC – Hertfordshire County Council NNDR – National Non Domestic Rates |

1.0 Introduction

- 1.01 The Elms hostel was commissioned in 2015 and following a procurement process, DENS were successful in securing the contract to act as a managing agent for the facility on behalf of the Council. The Strategic Housing Service works closely with DENS to ensure that a consistent and high quality service can be provided to single homeless clients. A key element of delivering accommodation for these clients is the ongoing management of the Council's contract for the Elms Hostel, as this underpins the Homelessness strategy. A strong working partnership has been developed between the Council and DENS and there are a number of ongoing projects that are being jointly resourced to address the increasing demand upon the Homelessness service within Dacorum.
- 1.02. DENS are required to deliver a service that promotes inclusion and does not prevent access unreasonably to any one group of people. Rooms are let on a priority basis to those single homeless clients with local connection to Dacorum. The hostel provides accommodation for individuals with varying levels of support needs, including those with very complex needs. As DENS receive an element of grant funding from HCC in the form of the Housing Related Support (HRS) Grant, the level of support must be provided in line with HRS contract requirements.
- 1.03 DENS are required to demonstrate to the Council the successful move on of clients. Successful move on is defined, as a client leaving the hostel to move into more settled accommodation in a planned way, through engagement with support and services. Each client receives support from a dedicated officer, who develops a support plan that is appropriate and meets a full range of client needs, which focus's upon clients achieving outcomes and improving independent living skills.
- 1.04 The Council requires DENS to fund and provide training and educational programmes for the clients accommodated in the hostel. DENS deliver training directly, and in partnership with other providers in Dacorum. Individual training needs will be agreed with clients during the support plan process and include back to work pathways, independent living skills, life skills, and tenancy sustainment.
- 1.05 There are further requirements for DENS to continue to support clients through outreach services once they have left the hostel, through the employment of outreach officers, who follow up case management after move-on, to prevent future tenancy failure.
- 1.06 Work had been started to procure a new contract, using an open tendering process and a Prior Information Notice (PIN) was issued by the Council in November 2019. Expressions of interest were received from four organisations; DENS, St Mungo's, Hightown Housing, and Thames Reach. All provided details as to how they would be able to deliver the services and at that stage consideration was given to a hybrid model, whereby the Council and one of the organisations work jointly to deliver the service. The Hybrid model was investigated further and it was considered that it would not derive any additional benefits beyond the service model currently being delivered and may introduce more operational and contractual risks, so this was subsequently discounted.
- 1.07 The expressions of interest to manage The Elms, all provided details of how each organisation would approach the operational management of the service. The internal project team did not consider that there were any new initiatives or alternative approaches to service delivery that would result in an improvement upon the existing DENS service, or demonstrated any enhanced benefits to the client

cohort. It should be noted that the PIN submissions are the preliminary part of the procurement exercise and that the opinions of the project group were based upon these initial submissions, which had not been fully developed by any of the interested providers.

- 1.08 The procurement of a new contract was suspended due to the pandemic and need to focus on the operational delivery due to the rise in homeless numbers. The original five-year contract was extended by 2 months to June 2020 and authority was granted by Cabinet, on 23rd June 2021, to award a concession contract for a one-year period, with the option of extending for a further year, to June 2022 to provide resilience during the Pandemic and in the recovery phase.

2.0 DENS Performance

- 2.01 It is acknowledged, both by officers and members, that DENS provide a valuable service to Dacorum’s homeless residents and that this extends beyond the provision of accommodation and support at the Elms. DENS has a strong brand identity as an effective homeless charity in the Borough and is able to leverage funding and other donations from individuals and businesses, to invest in both the Elms and other community initiatives. DENS has been very successful in securing assistance with food donations and catering support to enable much of the food at the Elms to be heavily subsidised. It also has an established volunteer base, which is able to support some areas of delivery and have a number of social enterprise opportunities, which can assist their clients to develop skills and experience to secure employment.
- 2.02 DENS performance is assessed by way of monthly operational meetings, conducted with the Hostel Manager and the Council’s Independent Reviewing & Project Lead Officer and quarterly Core Group meetings, led by the Group Manager, Strategic Housing. The Core Group meeting covers a number of areas against the contract including, building management and repairs, health & safety, staffing and delivery against the Key Performance Indicators, which are outlined in Table 1, below. The performance report is contained in Appendix A and the Continual Improvement Review for the year ending September 2020, is contained in Appendix B.
- 2.03 In addition, quarterly joint monitoring meetings are held with Hertfordshire County Council, to monitor delivery against the Housing Related Support (HRS), commissioned contracts. The partnership relationship is strong and well managed, there have been no contract non conformities or major delivery issues. Any minor issues arising are addressed through close joint working.

Table 1

| Key Performance Indicator | Aspiration service level | Expected service level | Agreed service tolerance | Critical service level |
|--|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Occupancy rate | 96% | 90% | 70 - 89% | <70% |
| Percentage of rooms ready-to-re-let within 24 hours of becoming vacant | 100% | 90% | 80 - 89% | <79% |
| Arrears as percentage of income | 1.5% | 2.5% | 2.51 - 4% | >4% |
| Percentage of clients successfully moved-on (defined later in this document) | 95% | 80% | 70-79% | <69 |

| | | | | |
|---|------------------|------------------|--------------|-----------|
| Percentage of clients receiving an initial assessment within 24 hours | 100% | 90% | 80 - 89% | <79% |
| Percentage of clients receiving an initial support plan within 5 days | 100% | 100% | 95% | <90% |
| Number of clients involved in service scrutiny (defined later in this document) | Minimum 5 people | Minimum 3 people | 1 - 2 people | 0 people |
| Number of clients accessing crash pad facilities | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 or more |
| Percentage of support plans up to date | 100% | 90% | 80 - 89% | <79% |

2.04 The impact of the pandemic increased the number of homeless presentations, due to the restrictions imposed through the The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020, and the “Everyone in” requirement. At the height of the first wave the number of homeless households increased from 95 to 160, including a large cohort of single individuals that were accommodated at the Elms hostel.

2.05 DENS worked closely with Public Health to make sure that all measures that were implemented at the Elms were complied with the guidance and reduced the risk of virus transmission as far as possible. This involved a higher degree of control on the movement of residents, especially during the most restrictive lockdown and additional cleaning regimes and increase service provision to ensure that any residents that did test positive could self-isolate safely and that any necessary medical supplies and food could be delivered to the individuals rooms.

2.06 There are a number of benefits of maintaining an ongoing relationship with DENS, who aside from managing the Elms facility, provide a number of wider community initiatives including a food bank, day centre services for homeless clients, access to move on accommodation, a community outreach day programme including a skills and training hub. DENS have both a very strong level of political and community support, including a large bank of volunteers.

3.0 Contract Options Appraisal

3.01 The impact of the pandemic and a desire to ensure continuity of service delivery during this challenging period, resulted in the initial two months extension to the original five year contract, to conclude in June 2020. Subsequently authority was granted by Cabinet, on 23rd June 2020, to award a concession contract for a one-year period, with the option of extending for a further year, to June 2022 to provide resilience during the Pandemic and in the recovery phase.

3.02 A further review of the options for either procuring a new contract, or extending the concession contract has been undertaken and the relative merits of each considered. The review has been undertaken, cognisant of a number of factors that have impacted the homeless service, with a marked increase in complex cases presenting as homeless. Such cases can have more than one negative factor influencing their ability to access and retain stable accommodation. These cases

include those who have dual diagnosis, with alcohol and/or drug dependency combined with a mental health diagnosis, or those who due to Adverse Childhood experiences or who have been in care, which often impacts their ability to sustain tenancies. Additionally the numbers fleeing domestic abuse are increasing.

- 3.03 Additionally, HCC are undertaking a review of temporary accommodation countywide, as part of the Hertfordshire Growth Board Development Programme. The review is considering opportunities to address disproportionate demand and availability of accommodation and improve collaboration across districts. One option that is being considered as part of this review, is to centrally control and procure services across the County. If this option is adopted, it will be necessary to consider the impact of this on any future contracts for the management of the Elms, as the Housing Related Support funding (HRS), currently £115K may be reduced, or allocated based upon differing criteria. Housing related support (HRS) services for adults with complex needs, have been commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council since 2003, with the aim of developing or sustaining an individual's capacity to live independently in accommodation. The uncertainty that this would introduce into a procurement process would make it difficult for any potential bidders to assess the impact on the delivery of the service and therefore is likely to impact the costs in the tender returns. Therefore it would be prudent to ensure the review is concluded and the recommendations implemented before a new contract is procured.
- 3.04 The Government have produced a Green Paper: Transforming Public Procurement has been published and the consultation period closed on 10th March 2021. It is anticipated that this will result in some changes to future public procurement activities. Any anticipated changes would not impact the timeline for the current recommendations, but financial thresholds may be subject to revision and any future procurement of the Elms contract will need to be in line with resulting changes to the Public Procurement Regulations.
- 3.05 The option to procure a new contract to deliver the management and operation of the Elms has been considered as there are a number of benefits to undertaking an open market tendering exercise, to provide a full assessment of service provision and costs. The ongoing uncertainty, as a result of Covid-19 pandemic and recent ending of the moratorium on evictions, is likely to continue with a period of significant increased demand on both the Elms service and the Council's homeless prevention team. It is crucial to provide stability and resilience, which could be undermined by diverting resource into a tender exercise. Additionally the cladding will need to be replaced imminently and DENS are aware and have agreed to work closely with the Council to ensure service provision can be maintained throughout the delivery of the project.
- 3.06 Consideration to extend the period for the concessionary contract would enable the HCC review and the impact of the proposed changes to public procurement to be concluded and would also provide a further period of stability and resilience for the both the current service provider DENS and the Council.
- 3.07 Under the criteria set out in the Concession Contracts Regulations 2016, an option for the concessionary contract to be extended for a further two years on a 1+1 basis could be awarded to DENS, as the concessionary contract would transfer the operating risk to DENS. Should the recommendation to extend the concessionary contract with DENS be agreed, the total value of this concessionary contract, will need to ensure that it does not exceed the £4.733M threshold as outlined in the Concessionary Contract Regulations 2016.

3.08 The concessionary contract would be extended to June 2024, which would provide sufficient time for the recovery from the pandemic, conclusion of the HCC review, for the cladding works to be completed and the impact of any material changes to public procurement regulations to be understood. This would enable the retendering exercise will be reflective of the future delivery of the service and any improvements upon that which DENS currently provide. This approach will also provide the opportunity to consider the performance measures used on this, and other concessionary contracts that the Council award, to make sure they deliver on the stated objectives and derive the maximum benefit to the community.

4.0 Financial Considerations

4.01 DENS receive the income from the rental licence fees, housing benefit and HRS grant income and some ancillary income from a van lease rebate, service charges including laundry services, and in 2020, additional grant to address the impact of the Covid-19. The Council do not pay DENS for managing these services, as the contract was designed to have sufficient income from the rents and other income.

4.02 Under the existing Elms contract arrangements, the Council recovers the costs of utilities and day to day repairs, but there is no provision for dilapidations or for ongoing management of cyclical repairs and maintenance, which the Council oversees. The Council also retains the insuring liability.

4.03 Based on the Rateable Value set by the Valuation Office, the rental value is circa £10/Sq. or £56,000 per annum. This is subject to 80% relief due to charity status and a further 20% discretionary relief, so DENS do not currently pay any NNDR.

4.04 The Council Tax for the property is Band H – that means that the 100% charge for the current year is £3,789.98. As the property is used as a homeless hostel, there is a 50% discount in place and this would be the case no matter who is liable, while the same use continues, the amount of council tax paid by DENS in the current year is £1,894.99.

4.05 The Elms operation, managed by DENS, is a vital service, which underpins the Council's statutory response in preventing homelessness. Without the ability to prevent or relieve homelessness into a facility like the Elms, there would be significant additional pressures on the Council's Strategic Housing Service, who manage the homeless prevention response. Each household placed into the Council's own temporary accommodation, costs on average £67 per case in respect of administration costs, additionally average support provided at 1 hour each week, per client, equates to an average cost of £1477.52 per client if delivered by our internal Tenancy Sustainment team.

4.06 Where a client's homelessness cannot be relieved by placement into the Elms, it is necessary for the Strategic Housing Service to take a homelessness application, each application costs the Council on average £730 for non-complex case, rising to £1100 complex casework and intervention, which further highlights the benefits of the existing contract with DENS for the management of the Elms to alleviate additional costs, which would otherwise be borne directly by the Council.

4.07 Should the recommendation to extend the concessionary contract with DENS be agreed the total value of this concessionary contract with DENS will need to ensure that it does not exceed the £4.733M threshold as outlined in the Concessionary Contract Regulations 2016. An extension of the concessionary contract of a further

two years is within this threshold value. The threshold limit of £4.733m is based on the turnover of the contract, in the case of the Elms service, this is the projected income received by DENS for the provision of housing and support services. As current income is projected to exceed expenditure, the Council receive a proportion of the annual surplus received by DENS towards the costs of cyclical maintenance.

5.0 Recommendation and next steps

- 5.01 It is recommended that the Council extend the concessionary contract by a further two years, with provision for continued monitoring of performance, which should remain, at or above target and that this is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure services are delivered in line with the contract.
- 5.02 It will be necessary to finalise the concessionary contracts to incorporate the percentage contribution towards cyclical maintenance costs and continue to work closely with DENS during the post pandemic recovery phase.

APPENDIX A PERFORMANCE REPORT

| | Client Data | Number | Definition and notes |
|----|---|---------------|--|
| 1 | Total no. of clients accommodated (excl crash pad) | 54 | Number of residents who have stayed at least one night during the reporting month |
| 2 | Total no. of clients accommodated in the crash pad | 13 | Number of people who have stayed at least one night during the reporting month. |
| 3 | No. of clients referred by DBC | 1 | figure represents number of new TA clients referred during the reporting month only who took up places at The Elms |
| 4 | No. of clients referred by other agencies | 2 | Figure represents number of new clients referred during the reporting month only who took up places at The Elms. |
| 5 | No. of self-referrals | 8 | figure represents number of new clients referred during the reporting month only who took up places at The Elms |
| 6 | No. of occasions that SWEP provisions are activated | 20 | refers to any period of one or more nights where SWEP beds are made available |
| 7 | Total no. of nights that SWEP provision is available | 20 | |
| 8 | No. of unilateral support plans | 0 | Refers to any support plan created in the month by the key worker without the involvement of the client. |
| 9 | No. and length of exclusions | 0 | |
| 10 | No. of people refused access | 0 | |
| 11 | No. of evictions | 5 | 1 for ASB 3 due to breaches of Covid rules 1 due to prison recall |
| 12 | No. of rooms ready to re-let within 24 hours/ over 24 hours | 1 | Additional cleaning required due to Covid 19 protocols |
| 13 | No of clients receiving their initial | | All new clients received their initial assessment within 24 hours of |

| | | | |
|----|--|---------|--|
| | assessment within 24 hours | | admission |
| 14 | No of repairs logged | 9 | Repairs to showers, doors, windows, Fire doors inspected. |
| 15 | No and type of H&S incidents | 0 | |
| 16 | Any relevant Force Majeure Events or Relief Events | | |
| 17 | Number and type of incidents of conflict and behavioural management; | | 5 related to the cases outlined in item 11 |
| 18 | No of CCTV requests | 4 | Viewed in relation to evictions/ASB |
| 19 | No. of complaints | 0 | |
| 20 | Average Length of stays | 93 days | |
| | General Update | | Clients began engaging in our new "Life Skills" programme which assists clients with cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, computer skills and training which empowers them for when they leave The Elms. Clients attended in house TST, the feedback was very positive and found the courses very interesting |



The Elms

Continual Improvement Review

September 2020

This report covers the period from September 2019 - September 2020.

1 Coronavirus Impact and Response:

By mid-March 2020, Coronavirus had begun to impact on the operational service The Elms Working with the Director of Public Health, Hertfordshire County Council, DBC and following government guidance, a COVID plan was quickly put in place, to ensure the Elms could remain open, in a safe and COVID secure manner. This was modified on March 23rd, when 'lock-down' commenced, and then constantly revised in line with changes government guidance.

Summary of the Elms COVID Response plan

- 6 Isolation rooms set up for clients, each room has a microwave and kettle.
- All new referrals require to self-isolate in an isolation room for 7 days; any resident reporting or displaying symptoms to self -isolate
- Meals are bought to the room by staff and let outside the room, in line with social distancing
- Mental health and well-being of our clients is a priority, and therefore regular contact maintained with those in isolation through phone and Face-time
- All residents to wash their hand for 20 second before being given access.
- Additional 8 hours cleaning a day.
- As of Tuesday 24th March, all residents were advised they were to stay within The Elms and can only go out for 30 minutes unless it is for urgent medical appointment or agreed with Management. This was revised with lifting of government restrictions
- The police will be contacted if residents leave for non-essential reasons.
- Residents will be warned if they leave for a period of time for non- essential reasons, and if they continue to do this, they will be evicted. DBC would be notified
- Rota implemented for meals times to ensure social distancing.
- Crash-pad: as of 26th March and in accordance with Government guidance, individual could no longer share the crash-pad space; each attendee must have their own room. This reduced capacity to just 3 beds.



- All non-operational staff to work from home, until government guidance changed.
- During this period, DENS worked with DBC to ensure all rough sleepers were found alternative accommodation.

The period from end of March until mid-July, when the majority of the restrictions were lifted, posed very challenging time for both residents and staff. Residents could not access the full range of drug and alcohol and mental health support services as previous. A number of clients went through drug and alcohol withdraw whilst in isolation; with staff doing all they can to support them.

A number of residents made the decision to leave the Elms and stay with family and friends during lock down.

The Elms did remain fully operational during this time. We continue to monitor the COVID situation locally, and have COVID continuity plans in place that will be implemented if forte restrictions are applied locally or nationally.

2 Annual Equality Impact Assessment

DENS is committed to promoting equality and diversity within its services. The Council and DENS continue to work closely together to ensure that the service provided is joined up and clients are provided with appropriate advice and assessment to secure accommodation.

Where DENS is not able to provide a service which may be due to the immigration status of the client or health or safety restrictions, which can relate to previous offending behaviour of the client, DENS works closely with the Council to ensure the client receives appropriate advice and intervention to prevent street homelessness.

DENS will make adjustments to service provision and provide specialist individual support to uphold diversity and equality principles. The Elms has two disabled accessed rooms, these rooms have bene used throughout the year by residents with mobility issues.

The fire evacuation procedure to evacuate any resident with mobility or sensory issues was reviewed and revised this year by Black and White Fire Services.

It is mandatory for all DENS staff to complete Disability Awareness Training within one year of commencing employment and to attend as refresher course every 3 years.

3 Performance and Service Provision

DENS strives to constantly improve the service we provide for all our service users.

KPI's

| | 2019 | 2020 |
|---|----------|---------|
| Occupation Rate | 99% | 99% |
| Percentage Of Rooms available within 24 hours | 100% | 100% |
| Personal contribution arrears | 11% | 7.7% |
| Positive Move on rate | 58% | 48% |
| Percentage of support plans up to date | 100% | 100% |
| Average Stay | 113 Days | 89 days |

Move Ons

Where residents move to:

| | 2019 | 2020 |
|----------------|------|------|
| DENS Move On | 25% | 31% |
| Social Housing | 38% | 31% |
| Private Rent | 3% | 2% |
| Friends/Family | 23% | 30% |
| Other | 2% | 6% |

Key Points:

- Average Length of stay: this had decreased significantly in 12 months. This is due to several factors;
 - Greater number of Move On clients moving into alternative accommodation, freeing up rooms in these properties

- Significant increase in residents moving in with family and friends. During COVID lock-down, a number of residents moved in with family or friends.
- Decrease in positive move on rate; this is likely to be due to high number of evictions or breach of COVID protocols.

Evictions

Reasons for Eviction

| | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
|-------------------------------|--------------|---------|
| Drug & Alcohol | 29.5% | 18% |
| Personal Contribution Arrears | 39.5% | 18% |
| ASB | 31% | 16% |
| Prison | Not recorded | 6% |
| Abandonment | Not recorded | 13% |
| Breaches of COVID protocol | NA | 29% |

- Breaching COVID protocols was the most prevalent reason for evictions. This was, in the main during ‘lock-down’ when residents could only leave the Elms for very short period of time in line with government guidance.
- Failure to pay personal contributions has decrease significantly. Residents on Universal Credit are now reminded to pay their contributions on the day they receive their UC; all residents on benefits also received an increase in their benefit amount and therefore have more income.
- ASB had decreased significantly: due to more robust management of resident’s challenging behaviour; better use of the ‘warnings’ system and residents being more aware of the implications of anti-social behaviour.

Re-Settlement

For Elms residents moving directly into either council or social housing, DENS Resettlement Team provides up to 12 months support to manage the transition from hostel living into more independent accommodation.



This service is fundamental to reducing the 'revolving door' syndrome that happen to so many clients who leave a hostel and move into social or council housing with limited support. This will often result in person not being able to cope, losing their tenancy and ending up either back in the hostel or homeless.

Whilst face to face to face meetings were put on put on hold during lock-down, support was maintained through telephone calls, FaceTime and WhatsApp. During this 12 month period, 73 clients were supported, and all have maintained their tenancy.

Crash-pad

Demand for the crash-pad remained busy. During this period, 57 individuals have accessed the crash-pad.

As stated previously prior to COVID, we could accommodate up to 12 people each night in the crash-pad; however this had now reduced to 3. This had led to referrals being turned away almost every night, and a decrease in the annual number of those accessing the crash-pad.

Cold Weather Provision

With funding from DBC, from the 24th November 2019 until the 23rd March 2020 (when lock down came in), we were able to extend the Cold Weather Provision, which included;

- Day centre open 5 nights a week and Saturday during the day, for any person who had no accommodation. They could use all the Day Centre facilities (shower, laundry, access to clothes etc.), and on week nights, transport was provided to the Elms.
- Elms - crash-pad - available to anyone who otherwise would have nowhere else stay. Anyone accessing the crash-pad would meet either with a DENS Key-worker or DBC Housing officer the following morning to work with them to find more appropriate accommodation
- During this period a total of 55 individual accessed the crash-pad

Training and Development for clients

All residents have a support plan that they develop and review with their key worker. The support plan includes training and development. Where possible Elms key workers will link residents into locally based training and support providers, such as Southill Centre.



In June 2020 DENS Board agreed to use un-restricted income to fund the post of ETE (Education, Training and Employment) Co-ordinator. The post holder will work across DENS services to support clients to develop and access pathways to education, training and employment. The ETE Co-ordinator will work closely with key-workers and the DENS Social Enterprise Team.

The recruitment of the post has been delayed due to COVID, however we expect the post-holder to be in place by the December 2020.

4 Social Enterprise

The overall aims of the social enterprise programme are short term to provide DENS clients as well as vulnerable adults in the community with a supportive environment to develop pre-employability and work skills; medium term to provide an additional income source for DENS that can be used to further develop our social enterprise and training programme.

Three programmes were initially piloted to ascertain which would be the most feasible long term based on participation and engagement rates; potential for clients to develop employability skills and medium term income potential. During this year, it was agreed to focus on the Bike project, and the Catering project.

Bike project: The bike project has really developed this year. Participants can attend 3 days a week and learn a range of skills including bike repair and maintenance, customer service, as well as team work, communication skills and acceptable behaviour in the work-place.

14 current or previous residents have participated in the project. All participants involved in repairing bikes, get to keep a bike for personal use. Bikes have also been provided for several residents of the Elms to use to get to work.

Catering project: The Catering project was just starting to pick up bookings when COVID hit; resulting in bookings being cancelled and events postponed. The project has catered for 4 small events, with ex-residents from the Elms (who are now in Move On), participating in all.

The team does have a number of bookings scheduled from spring 2021 onwards, COVID dependent.



5 Partnership Working

Partnership working is key to the success of DENS, not only at The Elms, but organisationally. This includes working in partnership with DBC, as well as other statutory and third sector organisations.

- DENS are active members of the Homelessness Forum and DENS CEO is the vice-chair
- A Senior Manager from DENS also attends JAG, and the PCC Rehabilitation of Offenders sub-group and Early Intervention sub-group.
- ELMs Manager is a member of HART

The Elms work closely with a number of third sector and public sector organisations, including Drug-link, Southill Centre, HYH, CGL, and Hightown Housing.

Prior to COVID restrictions, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Marijuana and Cocaine Anonymous all hold weekly meetings at the Elms.

6 Customer Feedback and Quality Assurance

Residents meetings are held monthly and the times of these are advertised widely within the Elms. There is also a suggestion box at the Elms. Quarterly feedback surveys are undertaken.

In September 2020 DENS was awarded the nationally recognised Trusted Charity Mark (formerly the PQASSO Quality Mark). The Trusted Charity Mark is externally verified and addresses all the essential areas necessary for the effective management and governance of a charity.

7 Challenges

COVID: Like all, we do not know what is likely to happen with the pandemic. We have a robust COVID contingency plan in place that can be implemented immediately if there is a significant increase in cases in the Dacorum area, and/or more stringent restrictions are implemented.

Increase in Demand: Year on year, there has been an increase in demand for the Elms. As the full financial impact of COVID takes its toll on the community, we do expect to see an increase in demand for all DENS services,



including The Elms. We are currently working with DBC Housing Team in regard to the development of alternative temporary housing options.

Recruitment of Key-workers: We have found it difficult to recruit to experienced and committed individuals to this post. This is due to a combination of factors including currently fairly low unemployment rates in the area, close proximity to London and therefore competing with roles offering inner London weighting and the post involving shift work. We have reviewed our recruitment process, as well as the remuneration packages and are confident this will make a difference

8 Planned Improvements for the Next Year

Additional Stage 2 Accommodation. DENS had identified alternative accommodation for those residents who are ready to move on from The Elms, but still require more support that is provided within our Re-settlement and Move on Services. We are currently in discussion with DBC Housing Team in regard to this.

We are also aiming to purchase our first property for Move On service; at present DENS Move On properties are all leased from either the Council or private landlords. Owning our own properties will give us far more flexibility in terms of the service we can offer. We will be investigating the feasibility of providing long term supported accommodation for those who require far greater support in the community.

Social Enterprise: We have recently been awarded a grant for Homeless link to invest in the development of the Social Enterprise programme. The funding will be utilised to develop more formalised training pathways for participants of the programme and the development of the catering arm.

ETE co-ordinator: The ETE will be recruited by December 2020, and will work across the served to support DENS clients into education, training and employment.

Wendy Lewington
Chief Executive

Sean Fitzgerald
Head of Accommodation Services

9th October 2020





AGENDA ITEM:

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Report for: | Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee |
| Date of meeting: | 21 July 2021 |
| Part: | Part I |
| If Part II, reason: | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Title of report: | Syrian Refugee Resettlement Program |
| Contact: | Margaret Griffiths, Portfolio Holder Housing Author - Mandy Peters, Tenancy Sustainment Team leader |
| Purpose of report: | To update the Committee on the Refugee Families resettled in Dacorum and consider their longer term housing options, once Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) is obtained. |
| Recommendations | That members consider the report and recommendations and comment as appropriate. |
| Corporate Objectives: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Building Strong & Vibrant Communities 2. Providing Good Quality Affordable Homes, in particularly for those most in need. |
| Implications: | |
| 'Value For Money Implications' | |
| Risk Implications | |
| Equalities Implications | The recommendation would provide certainty and stability to a group of families that were forced to leave a very dangerous and war torn country and one that remains so and arrived in the UK with government support.. |
| Health And Safety Implications | |
| Consultees: | <p>Mark Gaynor, Corporate Director of Housing & Regeneration</p> <p>Fiona Williamson – Assistant Director Housing</p> <p>Natasha Beresford – Group Manager Strategic Housing</p> <p>Oliver Jackson – Group Manager Tenants & Leaseholders</p> <p>Senior Leadership Team</p> |
| Background papers or appendices | |
| Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report: | <p>DBC – Dacorum Borough Council</p> <p>LHA – Local Housing Allowance</p> <p>DHP – Discretionary Housing Payment</p> <p>SVPRS – Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme</p> <p>LA – Local Authority</p> |

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| | ESOL – English as a Second Language GP – General Practitioner LA’s – Local Authorities CMT – Corporate Management Team ILR – Indefinite Leave to Remain |
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1. Introduction and Executive Summary

- 1.1 The government advised that the UK would commit to resettling 20,000 Syrian Refugees over a period of 5 years between 2015 and 2020. On the 30th September 2015 the Council carried a motion supporting the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) and along with 8 other Hertfordshire districts, Dacorum agreed to welcome 10 refugee families over the course of 5 years, with the first family arriving in September 2016. Appendix 1 details the household make up and the support still required by the families. The plan was to resettle 2 families per year, we have yet to welcome our final family as the scheme is currently on hold due to the Covid19 pandemic.
- 1.2 There was an option to join other local authorities (LA's) in Hertfordshire to fund the Refugee Council to provide support to the families, however with dedicated resources such as the Welfare and Sustainment Team, Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) has provided the support directly with the help of our partners in the community and voluntary/faith sector. This has allowed us to invest more of the grant funding in the provision of ESOL (English as a second language) and support to assist the families to integrate. The Home Office guidance gave clear details about the use of the annual funding.

2. Initial Reception Arrangements

- 2.1 Operationally, the responsibility for the resettlement of the refugees sits with the Welfare and Sustainment Team, The Welfare and Sustainment officer's role is to ensure that Refugees are provided with a dedicated source of advice and support, to assist with registering for benefits and services, and signposting to other advice and information.
- 2.2 Examples of this support includes: Registering with local schools, or if Adults, English language and literacy classes. Registering with a local GP, and other healthcare providers in line with identified medical needs, advice around and referral to appropriate mental health services and to specialist services for victims of torture as appropriate.
- 2.3 Additionally the officers provide assistance with access to employment. Bespoke support plans are developed for each family to document and monitor progress and to facilitate their orientation into their new home and area. We ensure that interpreting services are available and have built up a trusted team in partnership with Hertfordshire's Interpreting service.

3. Provision of Accommodation

- 3.1 An integral part of the resettlement process is the provision of accommodation. The property must be available for the arriving Refugees, must meet local authority standards and be affordable and sustainable.
- 3.2 For this reason the Council opted to use our own housing stock rather than source accommodation in the private sector. This was for a number of reasons, but in the main, consideration had to be given to the lack of affordable housing in the area, the management of the accommodation, quality and security of the

property and choice of area to place the families. Careful consideration was undertaken in respect of the location and suitability of properties for families with young school aged children.

4. Current Tenancy Position

- 4.1 With the families arriving and receiving humanitarian protection visa's it was deemed appropriate to initially provide them with a license rather than a flexible tenancy. With the change to Refugee Status and following a consultation with the legal team, it was recommended that each existing and future family were given a flexible tenancy.
- 4.2 The flexible tenancies provided each household with more security and rents were charged at normal formula rent, rather than the higher Temporary Accommodation licence levels. In line with the tenancy strategy the minimum term offered by the Council was 5 years and so a number of the families have tenancies that were started on 6th May 2019 and therefore, due to expire in May 2024. Additionally, due to the ages of two of the households, they have been allocated supported housing properties, which are in lower demand and therefore have a secure council tenancy.
- 4.3 The original report, outlining the various options for housing and support, was presented to CMT and Cabinet, in 2015, and anticipated that the requirement would be for a 5 year period, as it was hoped that they may, in the future, be able to return to Syria. The report did not fully consider the option of these families remaining in the UK and their ongoing housing situation after the 5 year period, as it was anticipated they may be resettled back in Syria.
- 4.4 The crisis in Syria has continued to escalate with a huge number of Syrians still fleeing homes and villages because of outbreaks of violence. The change to Refugee status, for all the families settled in Dacorum, means that within a month of their 5 year anniversary of arriving in this country, they will either have to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain or lose their status and along with it any right to healthcare, welfare benefits and support.

5. Alternative Housing Options

- 5.1 An alternative to remaining in DBC housing stock is that families could be supported to move into the private rented sector. Unfortunately there is a considerable shortage of affordable private homes at the moment especially where the rent levels would be below the Local Housing Allowance (LHA). The alternative would be for families to move to cheaper areas away from Dacorum removing existing support networks and connections made in the local area.
- 5.2 The Council's Allocations Policy is currently under review and consultation is underway on the option to reduce the local connection to 5 years in line with neighbouring authorities. With the Indefinite Leave to Remain, a local connection of over 5 years and the vulnerabilities and health issues that a number of the families have, it would be likely that they would qualify for points on the housing register and be successful in gaining social housing.

- 5.3 Should the Council make the decision to terminate their tenancies at the end of the 5 year period, we would be making the families unintentionally homeless and requiring intervention from the triage and homeless prevention teams, at a time when they are already under considerable pressure.
- 5.4 A number of the Hertfordshire Local Authorities have used private properties to house families they have resettled through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS). All of these homes have rent levels higher than the LHA and has caused a considerable financial burden through either regular applications for Discretionary Housing Payment to top up the housing costs they receive through Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, or by the Local Authority, paying for the extra from the funding received from the home office.
- 5.5 There is still a lot of media interest in refugees at home and abroad and it remains in residents interest to understand what the Council have done in relation to the SVPRS scheme and others including resettling unaccompanied minors. The Council have been clear in accepting the 10 families over a 5 year period in conjunction with other LA's and the support of this scheme has enabled it to be effective.
- 5.6 The Council has recently considered a request from the Home Office, to accommodate Afghan Locally Employed Staff, who assisted with interpreting for the military personnel based in the country. It is considered that these families will be at high risk of reprisals in Afghanistan now that troops are withdrawing from the region. The Council are investigating the option to take 4 families through this scheme with the intention to provide a similar type of tenancy, so the numbers using the Council owned accommodation would be limited to 14.
- 5.7 Currently the Council have declined to consider Dacorum as an areas for resettlement of a wider refugee cohort, on the basis that we have already accommodated a number of families, whereas other districts have declined to take part in either the SVPRS or the Afghan Locally employed staff (LES) scheme.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Most of the families have integrated and settled well into the community. The decision to use council properties was one that allowed us control over the location of the home, reduce the cost to the families, to the Council and the public purse, considering the higher rent levels in the private sector. This affordability has led to some families finding employment and building safe secure homes within their communities.
- 6.2 It could be argued that uprooting and requiring these families to move house would have a significant impact on their wellbeing. Properties were selected for these families based on proximity to local services, access to places of worship, schools and health services and areas where it was felt these families would be able to integrate into local communities. The children are settled and doing well at school, have made friends and met other families locally and the families now feel comfortable in their surroundings and have invested in the homes and gardens. We have had no incidents of hate crime or concerns from residents

and have received no complaints about the resettling of these families.

6.3 Requesting the families to move, at the end of their 5 year flexible tenancies, could lead to a requirement to offer them housing through the allocations policy or homeless responsibilities and could significantly disrupt the support networks and positive steps taken by these families. This scheme has received very little negative reaction from residents and currently the Council has confirmed that these 10 SVPRS households and the 4 Afghan Locally Employed staff and their families will be the only resettled going forward.

7. Recommendation

7.1 The recommendation of this report is that at the end of the 5 year flexible tenancy each family is offered a secure council tenancy dependant on a successful application of ILR.

Appendix 1 - Current family update

The below table sets out the families who have been resettled in Dacorum

| | Arrival date | Family make up | Current circumstances | Remaining support needs |
|----------|--------------|--|--|--|
| Family 1 | Sept 2016 | Mum, Dad 2 older sons 1 teenage daughter | Dad working, Mum on PIP, 1 son married and moved out of area, other working full time and moved out. Daughter performing well at school | -Parents still have low level of English and not computer literate +support from sons -Mum has significant health issues |
| Family 2 | Sept 2016 | Mum, Dad 2 daughters, one son | Dad working, Mum supporting children who are performing well at school. | +Very independent and provide support to other families +Completed driving license and got car using grant scheme |
| Family 3 | Feb 2017 | Mum, Dad 3 sons plus baby born in 2019 | Dad found employment previously and volunteering pre-covid, Mum supporting children who require more help as behind with school work | -Mum still reluctant to attend ESOL -Few tenancy and DV issues so child protection plan in place. +Dad engaging with refugee council and looking at parenting support for Mum |
| Family 4 | Feb 2017 | Mum of family number 3 | Receives PIP due to health but currently on UC after issue at ESA healing. Was originally living with family no.3 but following family issues moved into her own SH property nearby | -Had to learn how to use a bank card and make payments as never been financially independent +working to get to know neighbours |
| Family 5 | Feb 2018 | Mum, Dad 2 sons and daughter | Not in employment. Mum previously volunteered. Mum and Dad have health issues and reluctant to find employment | -needing more financial support with budgeting +Children have good English and supporting parents -Opportunities not being accepted to help do activities, find employment and weight loss |
| Family 6 | Feb 2018 | Husband and Wife | Both retirement age and have a number of health issues | -low levels of English although have attended ESOL -reliant on WSO team and other |

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| | | | | families as not computer literate +take a lot of pride in property and garden |
| Family 7 and 8 | March 2019 | Grandma & Grandad, Mum & Dad Daughter, son and baby | Originally 2 households but moved into 1 property Grandparents don't attend ESOL and have a number of health issues Mum and Dad volunteered before Covid | -Lots of medical appointments and reliant on Dad -none of the family computer literate and require support +Mum and Dad doing English classes and encourage children to learn |
| Family 9 | Feb 2020 | Mum, Dad 2 daughters and 1 older son | Dad has severe PTSD and neither parent attending ESOL classes. Son struggles with MH as result of lockdown but found v.brief employment so hopeful will progress alongside college Older daughter has hearing impairment and struggling at school and with English Younger daughter doing well at school | +have family living in the UK but due to Covid not becoming as independent as expected -still require a lot of support to attend health appointments, encourage ESOL, pay bills and keep appointments |
| Family 10 | To arrive 2021 | | | |

Housing and Community OSC

Actions arising

| Date of meeting | Action point | Responsible for action | Date action completed | Update on action point |
|--|--|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 03/03/21 <u>HC/016/21</u> & Outstanding 16/06/21 <u>HC/030/21</u> | There is one outstanding with the Chair which she is having ongoing discussions with M. Gaynor's team with regard to funds for low income households to have green energy. Chair will inform the Committee when it has been updated. <u>Action:</u> The Chair to provide an update regarding funds being available for low income households to have green energy. | Councillor Imarni | | |
| 16/06/21 <u>HC/026/21</u> | Councillor Pringle wished to make a point of order regarding a comment made by Councillor Durrant. The Chair wanted | Councillor Imarni | | |

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| | <p>to obtain some advice as there was not a Legal representative at the meeting. The Chair was advised that the matter needs to be referred to Member Support. The Chair will report back to Councillor Pringle.</p> <p>Action: The Chair to report back to Councillor Pringle regarding the advice obtained in relation to the comment made by Councillor Durrant.</p> | | | |
| <p>16/06/21 <u>HC/027/21</u></p> | <p>Councillor Harden asked about the Performance Challenges on page 29, point 3.0 of the report and if there was an expected figure of complaints regarding Osbourne and what was being done to try and reduce the numbers.</p> | <p>N. Beresford</p> | <p>24/06/21</p> | <p>NB confirmed that less than 1% of all jobs completed by Osbourne should result in a complaint.</p> |

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| | <p>N. Beresford replied that she would draw attention to the Partnership Charter which is the focus on the 12 week improvement plan to tackle all aspects of performance and reinforce behaviours that are expected in line with the contract. In respect of the specific target, N. Beresford will feed that back.</p> <p>Action: N. Beresford to feed back the target regarding complaints in relation to Osbourne.</p> | | | |
| <p>16/06/21 <u>HC/027/21</u></p> | <p>Councillor Harden asked about if the Partnership Charter 4.0 of the report was available to Members.</p> <p>Action: N. Beresford replied that she will liaise with J. Grace and distribute it to Members.</p> | N. Beresford | 24/06/21 | <p>The Partnership Charter is currently in the final stages of completion and once finalised and has been shared with Tenants & Leaseholders Scrutiny Committee on 29 July it will be shared with Members.</p> |

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| <p>16/06/21 <u>HC/028/21</u></p> | <p>Councillor Adeleke asked how and who the awards of the Community Grants and Climate Change were decided and why where the Ward Councillors not advised.</p> <p>L. Warden replied that they are run by different teams and some more information can be obtained with regard to how the grants were administered and who is on the Board.</p> <p>Action: L. Warden will obtain information regarding Community Grants and Climate Change.</p> | <p>L. Warden</p> | | |
| <p>16/06/21 <u>HC/028/21</u></p> | <p>Councillor Freedman asked why the improvement works at the Children's playground at Canal Fields have stopped.</p> <p>M. Rawdon replied</p> | <p>M. Rawdon</p> | | |

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| | <p>that is does not fall within the Service. We manage the 4 Council Adventure Playgrounds. The open playgrounds are managed by Clean Safe and Green and Matt will ask them to respond.</p> <p>Action: M Rawdon will ask Clean Safe and Green to respond to Councillor Freedman regarding why the work at stopped at Canal Field playground</p> | | | |
| <p>16/06/21 <u>HC/028/21</u></p> | <p>Councillor Pringle asked whilst the issue of the children's playground was referred to Clean Safe and Green could the severity of the flooding at Canal Fields also be reported.</p> <p>M. Rawdon asked if Councillor Pringle could provide the photographs she had received regarding the</p> | <p>Councillor Pringle</p> | | |

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| | <p>flooding.</p> <p>Action: Councillor Pringle to provide photographs of flooding at Canal Fields.</p> | | | |
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Last Updated on 16/04/21

Housing and Community OSC: Work Programme 2021/22

When reminders are sent to officers for the report deadline: can we include Cllr Imarni (Chair) and Cllr Adeleke (Vice-Chair) to the email so they are aware of what items are on the agenda please?

| Meeting Date | Report Deadline | Items | Contact Details | Background information |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Wed 21 July 21 | Monday 12 July 21 | Action Points (from previous meeting) | | |
| | | The Elms Contract | Assistant Director for Housing Fiona.williamson@dacorum.gov.uk | <i>To be provided</i> |
| | | Syrian Refugees | Assistant Director for Housing Fiona.williamson@dacorum.gov.uk | <i>To be provided</i> |
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| Wed 1 Sept 21 | Monday 23 Aug 21 | Action Points (from previous meeting) | | |
| | | Budget Monitoring Q1 report | Assistant Director for Housing Fiona.williamson@dacorum.gov.uk | <i>To review and scrutinise quarterly performance</i> |
| | | Q1 report | Assistant Director for Performance, People and Innovation linda.roberts@dacorum.gov.uk | <i>To review and scrutinise quarterly performance</i> |
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| Wed 13 Oct | Monday | Action Points (from | | |

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| 21 | 4 Oct 21 | previous meeting) | | |
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| Wed 10 Nov 21 | Monday 1 Nov 21 | Action Points (from previous meeting) | | |
| | | Budget Monitoring Q2 report | Assistant Director for Housing Fiona.williamson@dacorum.gov.uk | <i>To review and scrutinise quarterly performance</i> |
| | | Q 2 Report | Assistant Director for Performance, People and Innovation linda.roberts@dacorum.gov.uk | <i>To review and scrutinise quarterly performance</i> |
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| | | Action Points (from previous meeting) | | |
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| Wed 1 Dec 2021 | Monday 22 Nov 2021 | Action Points (from previous meeting) | | |
| | | Joint Budget <i>Ideally no further items to be added</i> | | <i>To review and scrutinise quarterly performance</i> |
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| Wed 12 Jan 2022 | Monday 3 Jan 2022 | | | |
| | | Action Points (from previous meeting) | | |
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| Tues 2 Feb 2022 | Monday 24 Jan 2022 | Action Points (from previous meeting) | | |
| | | Joint Budget <i>Ideally no further items to be added</i> | | <i>To review and scrutinise quarterly performance</i> |
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| Wed 2 March 2022 | Monday 21 Feb 2022 | Action Points (from previous meeting) | | |
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| | | Budget Monitoring Q3 report | Assistant Director for Housing Fiona.williamson@dacorum.gov. uk | <i>To review and scrutinise quarterly performance</i> |
| | | Q3 report | Assistant Director for Performance, People and Innovation linda.roberts@dacorum.gov.uk | <i>To review and scrutinise quarterly performance</i> |
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