
DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

19 APRIL 2023

Present:

MEMBERS:

Councillors, Adeleke, Allen, Arslan, Banks, Barrett, Barry-Mears, Bassadone, Beauchamp, Bhinder, Birnie, Chapman, Claughton, Douris, Durrant, Elliot, England, Freedman, Griffiths, Guest, Harden, P Hearn, Hollinghurst, Imarni, Johnson, Link, Maddern, Su Mahmood, Peter, Pringle, Ransley, Riddick, Silwal, Sinha, Stevens, R Sutton, Symington, Taylor, Tindall, Townsend and Wilkie

OFFICERS:

C Hamilton (Chief Executive), M Brookes (Assistant Director Legal & Democratic Services)
C O'Neil (Corporate & Democratic Team Leader), L Fowell (Acting Corporate & Democratic Support Lead Officer) and J Gowlett (Desktop & AV Support Analyst)
The meeting began at 7.30 pm

1 MINUTES

Cllr Guest stated that her vote in regard to the Council Tax Report was not recorded, possibly due to a technical issue, and confirmed that she had voted for the motion, asking how this could be corrected. It was agreed that the minutes could be updated accordingly.

The minutes were otherwise agreed to be correct, and Mayor Birnie noted he would sign them in due course.

Actions:

- Minutes to be updated to indicate that Cllr Guest voted for the Council Tax Report motion.
- Mayor Birnie to sign the updated minutes as correct

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from members.

3 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

It was confirmed that no members of the public were participating in the meeting

4 ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chief Executive confirmed that following the close of candidate nominations, all Dacorum Borough Council wards were contested, as were the Parish areas of Berkhamsted Town Council's Castle, East and West wards, Tring Town Council's Dunsley, Bunstrux and Miswell wards, and Kings Langley Parish Council's Central and South wards. It was confirmed that all elections would take place on Thursday, 4th May, with the verification and counts of all borough elections, and the verification of town and parish elections to take place at Hemel Hempstead Sports Centre, commencing at 10.00pm on 4th May, with the counts of town and parish elections to commence at 11.00am on Friday 5th May at the same location.

Cllr Williams tendered apologies on behalf of Councillors Suqlain Mahmood, Timmis, Anderson, and Rogers.

Cllr Tindall tendered apologies on behalf of Councillors Hobson, McDowell, Dhyani, and Foster.

Portfolio Holders Updates

Cllr Williams – Leader of the Council

Cllr Williams referred to the previous council meeting's report on Amazon's decision to close their centers in Hemel, confirming that both centers had closed on 16th April, that Amazon had advised their associates had mainly transferred to their site in Dunstable, and the site was now being marketed by the landlord. He explained that he believed associates to mean employed staff, and noted that the size of the site being marketed would require a substantial operator.

Cllr Barratt - Neighbourhood services

For waste services, Cllr Barrett noted that refurbishment had been completed at the food and garden waste bulky waste at Cupid Green, and that staff consultation had begun on the roof optimisation programme, and Dacorum was confirmed to have retained its position as the fourth highest for recycling across the Hertfordshire authorities per the 2021-2022 HWP Annual Report. Over 25,800 residents were noted to have signed up to the garden waste subscription service, producing additional revenue to the borough in excess of £1.1 million.

For environmental services, Cllr Barrett noted that the Worth Saving food waste campaign was due to launch in May. It was confirmed that the Great British Spring Clean had taken place between 17th March and 2nd April, with three litter pick groups across Hemel, Tring and Berkhamsted, and noted that an additional 100 street champions had joined during February and March, bringing the total to 1,149 of which 737 had collected equipment. The 28 Duke of Edinburgh Award volunteer litter pickers were confirmed to have collected 127 bags of refuse and 119 bags of recycling. It was explained that a competition was going to be run for primary schools to win a signed copy of a book highlighting the importance of earthworms, along with a wormery provided by the local author, and that the plan was to run this during May to coincide with compost month, with planning also underway for the annual compost giveaway scheduled for 21st May. The Clean Safe Green teams were noted to have completed a cleanup on both sides of the A41 from the M25 roundabout at Kings Langley through to the roundabout at Tring, with 20 operatives collecting 5 tonnes and 2 road sweepers collecting 69 tonnes of rubbish. It was confirmed that grass cutting had commenced from week beginning 3rd April, and Splash Park had opened on 1st April, with roofing

CHAIRMAN

works due to complete that week and Astroturf replacement scheduled for the end of the season.

For trees and woodlands, Cllr Barrett noted that the Friends of Bunkers Park planned planting session had been completed on 18th March, planting 400 whips in Top Field and Pond Field, adding that across the borough contractors had planted 130 standard trees in housing and partner locations, and 2,100 whips in Bunkers Park and Gadebridge Park. New gates, fencing, and signage was also noted as having been installed at Bunkers Park.

For parks and open spaces, Cllr Barrett explained that a major clear-up of access routes into Durrants Hill open space had been completed, with new benches and signage being installed. Four new wildflower areas were confirmed to have been prepared in Risedale, Rucklers Lane, at Nash Mills, and Rumballs Road, and twelve buddleias planted in Gadebridge Park, with liaisons ongoing with the housing team at Northend Farm to plan more biodiversity initiatives and identify potential play areas at the site. A joint project with Sunnyside Trust to replace summer bedding plants in Heath Park with a more sustainable alternative was noted, as was the installation of wild bee tree nests in the Water Gardens at Gadebridge Park.

As part of his final report, Cllr Barrett highlighted two points from the period, (1) that over 500 whips and standard trees had been planted across the borough, demonstrating commitment to an ongoing tree-planting programme, and (2) that there had been a 199% increase in street champions, with a 233% increase in those who had collected equipment, reflecting the ongoing and growing success of the initiative. Cllr Barrett also expressed his thanks to all those he had worked with during his time as the portfolio holder, wishing them the best for the future.

CBM noted that she had been approached by a supported housing officer in Cranford regarding the lack of green bin service, and asked whether there was a plan in place for supported housing schemes to have a shared green bin. Cllr Barrett confirmed that there should be, and requested CBM send him the details to investigate and get back to her.

Actions:

- CBM to email Cllr Barrett with the details of a reported issue with green bin service for supported housing.
- Cllr Barrett to investigate a reported issue with green bin service for supported housing and share the findings with CBM.

Cllr Banks- Communities

Cllr Banks gave an overview covering the past four years, highlighting the efforts of officers during Covid-19 with particular regard to the test-and-trace service ranked in the top 15 most effective out of 315 such centres in the county, the animal welfare service's achievement of the gold PawPrints Award in each of those years, and praising the environmental enforcement team's recent nomination as finalists in the Keep Britain Tidy Excellence for Enforcement Award. It was noted that a pilot and new model for littering and public space protection order enforcement had been successfully implemented following residents concerns. Environmental health teams were noted to have carried out 3,322 visits to food premises, providing support and advice, with only a minority requiring enforcement action. Cllr Banks was pleased to report that air quality had improved in North Church, allowing the air quality management to be revoked, with those resources going towards other areas with poor air quality.

CHAIRMAN

For arts and culture it was noted that they successfully delivered the Herts Year of Culture 2020, the diamond in our crown. It was confirmed that the Active Dacorum initiative had been co-created and delivered, along with delivery of the social prescribing programme, and the Herts Cultural Education Partnership for schools and young people. It was also confirmed that three (inaudible) had been delivered across three years, with the fourth year being online.

For physical activity and sports it was noted that the Northridge Basketball pitch had been resurfaced and extended, and that a junior park run had been set up in Gadebridge Park in partnership with Fun Run. It was explained that the Healthy Hub project had supported over 3,700 residents, and that over 2,000 local residents had visited the Employability and Wellbeing hubs in the South Hill centre.

For community grants it was confirmed that 90 local community groups had been supported.

It was noted that the old town hall had first held a film festival and space week in 2019, and that a new ticketing website had been launched at the start of 2022.

For community safety it was noted that refresher training had been delivered for members, and that the action plan to ensure safeguarding of residents is embedded in all activities had been developed. It was explained that CCTV access had been provided to police during investigations over the past four years, and that two new domestic abuse policies had been developed and launched both locally and across Hertfordshire, with the delivery of domestic abuse awareness campaigns and partnership with Hertfordshire library and radio Dacorum highlighted. Cllr Banks stated that she and Cllr Griffiths would welcome Cllr England sharing their sound-bites supporting domestic abuse victims.

Cllr Guest asked whether Cllr Banks agreed that the refurbished basketball court would help promote healthy lifestyles in young people, reduce antisocial behaviour, and encourage interest in basketball as a sport. Cllr Banks agreed that the project offered a superb facility for all basketball players.

Cllr Adeleke noted that the cost of living crisis was also having a negative impact on mental and physical health as well as wellbeing, asking (1) what measures had been taken to support people in the borough, and (2) how the council was working with local agencies and charities to ensure the right support reached the right people in time. In response to (1), Cllr Banks agreed the cost of living crisis had impacted many people, and referred to central government schemes to provide energy support to residents, as well as conferences the council had led with the voluntary sector and other statutory authorities to identify service gaps and solutions through partnership working. It was noted that Dacorum Community Trust had been commissioned to administer and distribute Dacorum's portion of the Household Support Fund, and that DBC, in partnership with Community Action Dacorum, DENS, and Age UK, had run four pop-up events with a fifth to run the following day, providing guidance and support. It was confirmed that support information had been included in council tax letters, posters, and online through the website and social media. In response to (2), Cllr Banks highlighted that a project group had been established with DBC and several volunteer sector partners to address this. Cllr Adeleke further asked what measures were in place to ensure that the outlined measures were adequate and would continue. Cllr Banks noted that the current focus is on those just about managing, and that it was hoped the current project group would continue its work to support the current need and plan for the coming winter. DBC officers were also noted to be preparing

CHAIRMAN

proposals for an event at the end of September to promote the cost of living response across the borough and launch a forward plan for upcoming events.

Cllr Harden asked what events would be offered to celebrate the coronation of King Charles Cllr III. Cllr Banks confirmed that Dacorum Borough Council would be celebrating at Gadebridge Park on Saturday 6th, including a livestream of the coronation, family activities, and food and drink, and on Sunday would be partnering with the Old Town Traders Association to hold its monthly market to the Old Town high street, with the Windsor Castle coronation concert livestreamed from four o'clock to ten o'clock in the evening. It was also noted that in Tring the coronation was being celebrated in the Tring Churchyard, with a service at two o'clock followed by afternoon food, drink and fun, and that in Berkhamsted there would be a street party.

Cllr Tindall asked whether Cllr Banks agreed that the officers of the council and the voluntary sector had worked tirelessly to produce all outlined support methods to the requirements of the July motion, and deserved thanks accordingly, noting that it was a pity matters had not been publicised until February. Cllr Banks agreed and congratulated officers for their diligence, but stated that the delays had been resolved as quickly as possible.

Cllr Allen asked whether Cllr Banks would comment on the fact that 81% of PSPO patrols were in the town centre, and that 75% of all PSPO enforcements were smoking-related litter, wondering how this addressed widespread litter, dog fouling, and other public space issues across the whole borough. Cllr Banks noted that the highest footfall was in the town centre, leading to the highest abuse levels, and that the rate of cigarette butt littering was the fault of the smokers, not the officers.

Cllr Anderson- Place

Cllr Williams reviewed in Councillor Anderson's absence, referring to the presentation of the Hemel Story at UK Reef in May 2022 and noting that preparations were underway to present again in May 2023, and the Lambert Smith Hampton annual report was noted to have reported Hemel's reputation becoming stronger. The council was confirmed to be continuing to work closely with the Herts LEP and the Herts IQ, and the sale of the Riverside Shopping Centre, which is currently in negotiation, was highlighted. Methods of community engagement and the process of developing the Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision, and its purpose, were summarised, and it was confirmed that Thinking place has been commissioned to complete Place Narratives for Tring and Berkhamsted, with the Tring steering group having had four meetings since the narrative was completed, and the Berkhamsted steering group having met with Diane Southam, Assistant Director of Place, Communities and Enterprise. Hemel Place Strategy was noted as currently being drafted, along with Place plans for Tring and Berkhamsted. It was confirmed that two bids had been submitted for the Levelling Up fund, one for developing the Market Square and the other for public realm improvements in Hemel Hempstead town centre, which received positive feedback, but were unsuccessful, and that further bids had been submitted to the Herts Transforming Towns fund and (inaudible) for future opportunities. It was noted that a grant had been won from DLUHC, and the money used to complete the Paradise Design Code, which would be voted on by the council later in the agenda. Cllr Williams also noted that there was a detailed report on economic development, but asked, in the interest of time, that it be added to the minutes of the meeting.

Cllr Allen noted Cllr Williams might not know the answer, but asked what was being done in regard to the failure of the heritage specification of two listed buildings owned by the council, being 55 and 59 St John's Road, where windows were still not

CHAIRMAN

compliant, highlighting that the issue had been ongoing since 2016. Cllr Williams explained that his understanding was that the two council properties were made compliant to the conservation officer's satisfaction in 2022, and that the private property was currently within a period of time permitted for the issue to be rectified, but added that it was possible the private property had since changed hands, agreeing to check the current situation and clarify. Cllr Allen further noted his understanding that whilst the windows had been replaced, they were still not of the correct specification. Cllr Williams reiterated his understanding that the conservation officer was satisfied, but agreed to check.

Actions:

- Detailed report on economic development to be attached to the minutes of this meeting per Cllr Williams's request.
- Cllr Williams to investigate the compliance of listed buildings at 55 and 59 St John's Road and confirm the current situation with Cllr Allen.

Cllr Elliot- Corporate Services

For financial services, Cllr Elliot noted that the financial year had ended, and the process of completing year-end financial transactions would be the focal point of the finance service over the coming weeks, concluding with the production of the 2022-23 Financial Statements in July. The 2023-24 budgets were confirmed to have been implemented successfully, with a positive start to the year, including an introductory meet-and-greet with the new 2023-24 external auditors, with details of the new audit manager and regional liaison officer to follow. The revenue team were noted to have worked tirelessly to produce and distribute the 2023-24 annual council tax and business bills over the last two months. It was confirmed that final clarification on the Alternative Fuel Payment policy had been received, with Cllr Elliot noting that over 250 applications had been received and were now being verified. The government website was signposted for further information.

For legal and democratic services, Cllr Elliot noted that election preparations were in full swing, with over 300 candidate nominations reviewed and accepted, ballot papers approved, and postal votes starting to go out. Training of polling station and count staff was confirmed to be underway. The democratic support team were noted to be preparing the members induction programme for all councillors, commencing with two main induction days on 12th and 14th May, followed by a programme of mandatory training sessions and service briefings. Legal services were noted to have completed new governance agreements to conduct the council's continued involvement with the Hertfordshire Building Company, which the council is a shareholder of, and which provides a council building control statutory function. People and transformation was noted to be making significant progress, with a full complement of heads of service in place, and the delivery of the people's strategy was confirmed to be continuing apace, with a series of leadership development events, council sign-off of key policies, and ongoing support to the recruitment of key positions across the council. Plans for digital transformation were also noted to be progressing, with the team continuing to explore a new digital platform that will allow the council to conduct business in a more joined-up way, and residents to self-serve as appropriate.

For communications, an events programme for 2023, including plans for the King's coronation were noted to be progressing, and it was confirmed that information was being sent to voters regarding the new voting ID requirements. The transformation team (inaudible) and all services across the council to develop their annual service plans for 23-24, allowing greater collaboration across services, and assisting in the

CHAIRMAN

development of a performance management framework, procurement and ICT work programmes, and a medium-term financial strategy.

Cllr Elliot also expressed his personal thanks to Cllr Hamilton, Catherine, Aiden, Nigel, and FJump for all their support over their years, with a special call-out for Chris Baker and his team, and the benefits and revenues team, for their hard work during the pandemic.

Cllr Tindall added his thanks to all staff in the crisis, and asked if Cllr Elliot could outline the specific arrangements to cope with confusion around voter ID. Cllr Elliot confirmed it had been widely publicised, included on the polling card, that online application was free, and that officers had been briefed. The deadline for registration for voter ID was confirmed to be 5.00pm on 25th April.

Cllr England asked Cllr Elliot whether he agreed with the Right Honourable David Davis MP that voter ID risked hundred of thousands being blocked from casting their ballots. Cllr Elliot explained that he had not seen the quote, but that the requirement had been imposed by central government.

Cllr Imarni asked Cllr Elliot whether he would outline the procedure of applying for voter ID, wondering whether it was free to apply or free to residents, and whether people on lower incomes might be able to benefit from it after the election. Cllr Elliot confirmed it was free of charge.

Cllr Griffiths - Housing Services

Under housing operations Cllr Griffiths noted a reduction in householders occupying temporary accommodation as a result of partnership working and Move On accommodation. Trauma-informed principle and management training was confirmed as being rolled out across the service to front line staff and managers. Current rent arrears was confirmed to be 3.78% of the annual debt, compared to 3.7% at the out-turn of 2021-22. Mapping of service activity, and touchpoints relating to antisocial behaviour, tenancy management, and sustainment to support HTIP. An issues need assessment survey to residents to support HTIP was noted to have had 20%, or over 300 surveys, response to date.

Under safer communities, in respect of homelessness and the private rented sector, Cllr Griffiths noted that the strategic lead for Hertfordshire Housing Services would be supporting the development of the MEAN approach, with operational input to influence the delivery model of services to vulnerable residents. A collaboration event with Herts Fire Protection team was highlighted as having led to service of a prohibition notice on a property due to identified fire safety concerns. It was noted that an application had been lodged at St Albans Magistrates Court against an HMO landlord to be heard in June 2023, with 27 regulatory breaches to be considered.

Under property, Cllr Griffiths confirmed that the Osborne contract extension and renegotiation of rates was nearing completion, and that the Robust Management and Monitoring of service improvement plans would be in place and signed off at the same time. The contract recommission project was noted to be progressing well, with the internal stakeholder event to take place towards the end of April, and elected members to be involved in the summer. The financial environment was highlighted as a continuing challenge, particularly around labour and supplies. It was confirmed that the service target operating model was being worked out for the future of HTIP, to be signed off in the autumn. Compliance across the board was noted to be good, and it

CHAIRMAN

was stated that interim building safety cases were being pulled together with interim safety certificates to be issued by August.

Under investment and delivery, Cllr Griffiths noted that the Paradise Depot would be seeking to recruit a contractor at the April Cabinet meeting, and that recruitment of the investment team and heads of services were going well. Site activity was confirmed to be progressing well across a number of schemes, with site security and monitoring at Eastwick Row in place, and individual residents meetings for St Margaret's Way were confirmed to be taking place at the Forum on Friday 21st April.

Cllr Griffiths also thanked the housing team for all their work over the last four years.

Cllr Williams - Commercial Strategy and Delivery

Cllr Williams noted that there was nothing specific to report, but referred back to two items left from the previous full council meeting, explaining that they were ongoing situations without definitive answers, but offering to update. In regard to the installation of solar panels and the bulk buy scheme, with Dacorum to date having 2,183 registrations, 120 of which were for battery only, 368 acceptance of quotes to proceed to a survey, 31 of which were for battery only, 155 outstanding quotes either for a survey or awaiting the customer's decision to proceed, 149 installations, and 64 dropouts. Based on a dropout rate of 25%, Cllr Williams estimated 275 installations once the scheme is complete. Reasons for dropping out were noted to be 68% change of mind, 7% survey found the roof unsuitable, and 12% survey found lower than estimated capacity. Due to delays with the network operator, it was noted that installation completions had not been completed by April as previously hoped. In regard to direct applications for grants to support swimming pools, Cllr Williams confirmed that as far as he was aware none had been made, either directly or through an operator, but that the government had announced a £67 million scheme to support public swimming pools, although no details had yet been released.

Actions:

- Detailed report on economic development to be attached to the minutes of this meeting per Cllr Williams's request.
- Cllr Williams to investigate the compliance of listed buildings at 55 and 59 St John's Road and confirm the current situation with Cllr Allen.

5 BUSINESS FROM THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING

Cllr Symington noted that she had corresponded with the Leader, and believed a response was still being awaited from the police and crime commissioner regarding the actions being taken in terms of vetting and preventing misogynistic behaviour. In light of reports around the Metropolitan Police, Cllr Symington emphasised the importance of the police and crime commissioner responding to such queries from the Council Leader. Cllr Williams confirmed that a response was still pending, however noted that he had since found an alternative email to the one used for his initial letter, and had subsequently re-sent the question at issue.

6 CABINET REFERRALS

CA/33/23 Employee Code of Conduct

Recommendation agreed This was seconded and agreed.

CHAIRMAN

CA/34/23, Constitutional update Scheme of Delegation and Financial Regulations,

Recommendation agreed. This was seconded and agreed.

Cllr Tindall interjected that an important point had been raised at cabinet, referring to the bottom of page 34. Cllr Williams noted that matters relating to the conduct of elections were a matter for the chief executive in the capacity of telling officers, and confirmed that a comment from the returning officer in that role was at the bottom of page 34.

CA/35/23 Business Plan Update 2024 Housing Revenue Accounts

Recommendation agreed. This was seconded and agreed.

CA/36/23 Paradise Design Code Supplementary Planning Document

Recommendation agreed. This was seconded and agreed.

CA/47/23, Senior Officer Pay Policy

Recommendation agreed. This was seconded and agreed.

7 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REFERRALS

No referrals

8 CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

No changes to committee membership.

9 CHANGE TO COMMITTEE DATES

No Changes to Committee Dates

10 CALL IN AND URGENCY PROCEDURE

Cllr Williams noted that, as required under the constitution, the council was being given notice of a decision made under the call-in and urgency procedure, for information only, relating to the awarding of the contract for the implementation of the council's electric vehicle charging point programme.

11 AOB

With the formal proceedings complete, Mayor Birnie gave the floor to Cllr Williams for closing statements.

Cllr Williams noted that, with the exception of the Cabinet, it was the end of the Council's four years, there were a number of colleagues worthy of special mention, being Cllr Chapman, who had served 28 years, and Cllr Bassadone, who had served 47 years and was presented with (inaudible) in recognition of that time. Cllr Bassadone stated that she had thoroughly enjoyed most of her time on the council, but that Covid had brought a noticeable change, leading to her decision to retire, and wishing all

CHAIRMAN

councillors, current and future, well in the coming elections. The council gave Cllr Bassadone a standing ovation.

Cllr Williams further thanked, on behalf of himself and the council, the chief executive, officer team and staff of Dacorum Borough Council for their support and work, and thanked Cllr Tindall for the constructive and supportive way in which he conducted his opposition and leadership.

Cllr Tindall thanked Cllr Williams, noting that they had managed to work well together for the benefit of all residents, and joined him in thanking all the officers and staff of the council, hoping that the pleasantries would continue regardless of the outcomes on 4th May.

There being no other business, Mayor Birnie declared the council meeting closed.

The Meeting ended at 9.00 pm

CHAIRMAN