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**DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**18 JANUARY 2023**

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Present:

**MEMBERS:**

Councillor Williams (Leader) Councillors, Adeleke, Allen, Anderson, Banks, Barrett, Barry, Beauchamp, Bhinder, Birnie, Chapman, Claughton, Douris, Durrant, Elliot, England, Freedman, Griffiths, Guest, Harden, P Hearn, Hobson, Hollinghurst, Imarni, Johnson, Link, Maddern, So Mahmood, Oguchi, Peter, Riddick, Rogers, Silwal, Sinha, Stevens, R Sutton, Symington, Taylor, Timmis, Tindall, Wilkie and C Wyatt-Lowe

**OFFICERS:**

Chief Executive

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

**1 MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting, 23rd November 2022, were accepted as a true record.

**2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest from members.

**3 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no members of the public present.

**4 ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements from the Mayor or Chief Executive

Cllr Williams gave apologies for Cllr Suqlain Mahmood, Cllr Arslan, Cllr Bassadone,

Cllr Tindall gave apologies for Cllr Ransley, Cllr McDowell and Cllr Townsend.

**Portfolio Holders Updates**

**Cllr Williams – Leader of the Council**

Following the public notice that Amazon will be moving from Hemel, a senior representative has confirmed staff at the site are in the 45-day consultation period for transfer to Dunstable, but they are not renewing the expired lease on the building, which is too small and not automated enough. All staff will be offered alternative employment at the other site, on the same shift pattern, but they couldn't confirm the inclusion of agency staff and those directly employed by Amazon. It was also confirmed that the delivery station on Swallowdale Lane is also being transferred to Dunstable, but this is a smaller site not subject to the 45-day consultation, and all staff will transfer. Amazon confirmed that they were not looking for another site in the Hemel Hempstead or Dacorum area currently.

Cllr Williams also noted that, with immediate effect, all responsibility for the Council's non-HRA properties, being general fund properties, investment properties, and commercial estate, will move from the Place Portfolio under Cllr Anderson to Commercial Strategy and Delivery under Cllr Williams.

Cllr Tindall asked for confirmation that Amazon will no longer have a presence in Hemel Hempstead, and also asked if it was known whether Amazon was prepared to subsidise travel to Dunstable for those wishing to work at the alternate site. Cllr Williams confirmed that Amazon will have no presence in Hemel Hempstead. Amazon do provide a bus from Luton to Hemel Hempstead, but have made no comment about the transfer packages, and it isn't known if they will provide or subsidise transport in reverse.

Cllr Symington referred to a previously agreed motion, part of which included a letter to be written to the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire, and asked, in light of events in the Metropolitan Police involving an officer living in Hertfordshire, whether the leader would follow up on this letter and ask what actions are being taken to ensure the same thing can never happen in the Hertfordshire Police. Cllr Williams agreed to do so.

**Actions:**

- Cllr Williams to write to the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire regarding preventative measures taken or planned.

**Cllr Griffiths – Portfolio Holder for Housing**

In regard to Housing Services, the Assistant Director for Housing Operations and Safer Communities has been appointed and confirmed, and the familiarisation meeting has taken place. The bid for the LGA Housing Advisory Fund, consisting of £20,000 to support the progress of temporary accommodation review within the HA, has been successful. There is to be a review of homeless out-of-hours services to determine value for money and alternative options. New domestic abuse policies have progressed to external consultation and committees, with positive feedback on the proposed approach. Successful interventions have been undertaken to improve the condition of several town-centre based properties, and there is a pending civil penalty action against a local business for breach of regulatory housing standards. Five warrants are also pending execution on unlicensed HMOs. Contribution has been

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made to a collaborative activity supporting a partner-led approach to cost-of-living impact for residents, and there has been a review of the Allocations Policy income thresholds, which have been increased by 10% to reflect affordability pressures for residents. The State Inspection Programme is being progressed, as is the housing needs analysis for the support and tenancy sustainment needed, and an updated support model is being developed for discussion. A new service charge team leader is due to start in mid-February. Delays are being experienced in achieving dates at the County Court for possession hearings, and this issue is being raised with the Court. It will have an impact on arrears recovery, and potentially on legal action to enforce access to properties. A review of the Warden Alarm contract is progressing through the council's commissioning board, and the HRA Business Plan is being reviewed, with the financial model being updated with the current information and assumptions.

In regard to Housing Strategy and Tenant Engagement, the strategy's internal and external stakeholder consultation was completed in November-December, with the draft document on track for the end of January or early February. The Prevention of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy review has completed, including stakeholder engagement sessions in December, with a draft due to be shared end of January. An Osborne chatbot workshop is being planned in partnership with Osborne for February-March to get resident engagement. Delivery options, in-house versus external provider, are currently being researched for tenant satisfaction measures and the staff survey. £9 million has been secured from Homes England to support the Strategic Housing and Investment Programme, the AD has been appointed and confirmed, and handovers and familiarisation have commenced. Helix has been contracted for the St Margaret's Way project, and site activity is going well at Paradise, Randall's Ride, Wilstone, five garage sites, and Eastwick Row, however contractors have submitted claims for additional costs, citing inflation as the cause. The Paradise Depot project is out to tender, however the team are experiencing delays with HCC Highways and Flood Authority. The topping out ceremony for Eastwick Row is scheduled for 1st February, and a VIP tour of Paradise Fields is scheduled for 31st January. Recruitment for the investment team has commenced, with an interview scheduled this week. Cllr Griffiths noted that a virtual members briefing session on housing development was scheduled for the following night, and urged members to attend.

In regard to Housing Property, there has been a significant increase in damp and mould reports following reports in the media. DBC response has been reported to the regulator of social housing, and a comprehensive report has been presented to DBC elected members. Improved governance and oversight of the Osborne property services have been put in place to drive service improvements for residents, however it was noted that it will not be a quick fix. Total asset management recommission will require a contract extension to be sure the new methodology and approach is fully informed via proactive engagement and comprehensive consultation with all stakeholders. Performance across all six reportable areas of compliance remains consistently high. Notably, gas compliance outturn for December was 100%.

Cllr Douris requested the chair's indulgence to hear Cllr Griffiths' report in full. No objection was raised, and the chair permitted Cllr Griffiths to continue. Cllr Tindall

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suggested that the constitution be reviewed to introduce written reports from portfolio holders, so that members have the information beforehand and can go straight to questions.

Cllr Griffiths concluded that the outcome from the Greener Herts Consortium bid is expected mid-February, and will see around a £2 million investment in thermal upgrade improvements for 75 solid brick properties if successful. Preparatory work is being undertaken to produce building safety cases for seven in-scope DBC buildings for submission and assessment, for interim safety certificates in line with the requirements of the Building Safety Act. Phase one of the HTIP, about stability, is closing and informing phase two, about engagement, which will lead into phase three, transformation. The new communications plan is being pulled together to ensure all stakeholders are informed of the future journey and positive impacts to service.

Cllr Dhyani noted that there had been various emails regarding delays to repairs, and questioned whether there was a plan in place to tackle delays from Osborne. Cllr Griffiths reiterated that the situation with Osborne's underperformance is not an easy fix, but confirmed that there is an action plan in place, with discussions being held, tenants listened to, issues being understood and taken seriously, and a plan developed.

Cllr Symington requested an update on the situation with regard to housing of refugees and asylum seekers in the borough. Cllr Griffiths noted that the use of hotels is being monitored by a separate organisation in conjunction with the government, and whilst the council is assisting through welfare and education, housing is not currently in its control. Cllr Symington requested further clarification as to whether there had been further rehousing since the fourth or fifth house released last year. Cllr Griffiths noted that some had moved on, but confirmed that Dacorum had not housed any more.

### **Cllr Williams – Portfolio Holder Commercial Strategy and Delivery**

In regard to Commercial Strategy and Delivery, there were no additional items to report.

Cllr Symington requested an update on the Berkhamsted Leisure Centre upgrade. Cllr Williams noted that all options are currently under review.

### **Cllr Barrett – Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services**

In regard to Trees and Woodlands, the HCC free tree giveaway on 3rd December saw Dacorum residents collect 1,750 trees for use in their gardens, and is expected to repeat in the next financial year. 24,418 trees were collected across Hertfordshire as part of a plan to plant 1.8 million trees in the region by 2030. A Friends of Chipperfield Common Christmas Tasks event was also held on 17th December to clear holly and laurel from woodland areas. Updates are being prepared for Green Flag submissions at Bunkers Park and Chipperfield Common, incorporating sand (ph) management into existing plans, and preparations are being made to plant an additional 120 standard trees and 2,500 whips over the next three month period.

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In regard to Clean, Safe, Green, the Berkhamsted High Street deep clean was completed during December, installation of the third batch of 53 replacement street name plates is complete, all old style basket bins have been replaced, and replacement goal posts have been received and are ready for installation. A new graffiti prevention pilot scheme has also been running since early November, with 260 instances of graffiti reported via the app directly to team leaders.

In regard to Environmental Projects, Christmas tree recycling day on 8th January was a great success, with over 6,000 trees recycled. Local scout groups and St Francis' Hospice participated, offering a collection service to residents to assist their fundraising. Chippings were made available for residents to take away, and the remainder will be recycled into compost. Over 50 families took place in this year's Love Food, Hate Waste challenge, with 92% saying the challenge helped them reduce food waste in their household. Those completing the pre- and post-challenge surveys were entered into a prize draw for a food blender, with the winner randomly selected. Promotion of the Garden Waste Subscription Service has taken a considerable time. Leaflets have been designed, and will be distributed to all existing customers from week commencing 9th January, vehicle artwork has been designed and installed on all green waste vehicles, and website updates (ph) and FAQs have been uploaded on the website. As of 4:00pm today, 6,275 residents have signed up to the new paid service, an increase of 3.46% from the same time yesterday, and is 41.83% of the expected minimum number of applicants, which demonstrates the success of the initiative.

In regard to Parks and Open Spaces, the butterfly chalk bank at Warners End has been successfully completed, and several new benches have been installed at Dolphin Square in Tring. The Bring site at Grovehill has been removed, a number of picnic benches and a new planter installed, and daffodil bulbs planted. Work on Nash Mills continues, involving the installation of wildflower turf and bulbs, a planter, several benches, bee houses, and signage.

In regard to Waste Services, Christmas services all went according to plan, with schedules returning to normal as anticipated, and schedules for Easter and beyond now being planned. Previously budgeted refurbishment works have commenced at Cupid Green. A Long Service award service was also held at the depot and well received. Christmas tree recycling events were facilitated at Cupid Green, Berkhamsted, and Tring. Annual staff training has commenced, and will continue throughout January and February.

Cllr Tindall noted that the county is proposing a change to the arrangements for recycling across the ten districts, and wondered whether concerns regarding the impact on the borough had been brought to the attention of the portfolio holder, and if so, whether any decisions or actions had been taken. Cllr Barrett confirmed that the issue had not been brought to his attention, and so nothing had been discussed.

Cllr Freedman noted that protection of whips has previously been identified as challenging, and that there have also been high profile cases of mature trees not being protected, and wondered whether anything was being reviewed with the planning team

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to better protect established trees. Cllr Barrett explained that currently the local plan has to be followed, but this is something under consideration that will hopefully be incorporated.

Cllr Guest asked whether the chalk bank established at Warners End will contribute to an increase in biodiversity and the council's response to the climate emergency declared in 2019. Cllr Barrett confirmed that it will.

Cllr England wondered whether increasing the capacity of replaced bins was considered, possibly by increasing the number of bins in some locations. Cllr Barrett encouraged all councillors to report locations with overflowing bins for him to pursue with the service. Cllr England noted that previously such an increase was said not to be possible when reports were made, and that Chipperfield Common has doubled up bins, but Adeyfield Queen's Square does not. Cllr England further requested an update on how many Street Champions have registered, and how many have collected their equipment.

Cllr Barry-Mears noted that 6,275 residents is under 10% of 2011 households, and wondered if this was a good figure for the green bin sign-up. Cllr Barrett noted that not all of the 2011 households have green bins, and they are working to a target of 15,000 which excludes flats and other households without green bins, so the percentage so far is excellent.

The chair noted that Lawn Lane is also in need of extra bins.

**Actions:**

- Cllr Barrett to update all councillors regarding the impact of county-proposed changes to recycling arrangements, once details are known.
- Cllr Barrett to provide Street Champions update to Cllr England.

**Cllr Banks – Portfolio Holder Communities**

In regard to Communities, the Dacorum Crime and Disorder Strategic Assessment has been completed, helping to deliver the priorities for 2023 to 2026 for the Dacorum Community Safety partnership, which includes Dacorum Borough Council, Hertfordshire County Council, police, fire, probation, and health colleagues. Priorities are likely to include how issues like domestic abuse, serious violence, youth justice, exploitation, and preventing extremism and radicalisation are dealt with and implemented. It will also include how to ensure community resistance to crime is built through crime prevention initiatives. The Community Trigger is a tool that allows a review to be requested if the response to a report of antisocial behaviour is unsatisfactory. It can involve police, local health providers, and providers of social housing, all of whom have a duty to complete a case review when such a request is made.

In regard to Adventure Playgrounds, funding was secured from the Building Life Chances grant to install a shelter at Bennetts End, and from the Sports Together fund to support a twelve week youth sports programme. Children at adventure playground

are progressing work to become a hygiene hub, which will produce hygiene product packs for young people from low-income families, and in December the Grovehill adventure playground saw around 100 people attend a Special Education Needs information event, giving information to parents, carers, and professionals in the SEN sector.

In regard to Environmental Enforcement, the team has been shortlisted for the Excellence in Enforcement Award from Keep Britain Tidy, for work in partnership with district enforcement to address littering across Dacorum. The award recognises individuals or teams seen to excel in environmental crime enforcement for their organisation, and acknowledges those that are passionate about the work they do, and the results they achieve.

In regard to Community Grants, in December 2022 grants of just under £8,500 were awarded to local voluntary organisations, and five smaller grants were issued for projects aimed at supporting community activities.

In regard to the Cost of Living Crisis, the council is committed to ongoing partnership activities to support all impacted residents, and is working with the voluntary sector to ensure activities and support is targeted and not duplicated. An action plan has been developed, including detailed communication plans to ensure residents are aware of the available support. Dacorum Life and the council website have been refreshed, with the latter having an interactive map showing where support such as warm spaces and food banks are available across the borough.

Cllr England noted that DEFRA figures on Dacorum air quality, with significant findings, were sent back to DBC in July 2022, and that air quality could have been looked at in November if the portfolio holder, or the chair of scrutiny at SPAE, if aware, had made it a priority earlier. Cllr Banks agreed that some figures had been released from DEFRA, but that staff absence and vacant posts had delayed the report, and it is due next month at SPAE. Cllr England further wondered whether the portfolio holder remembered informing him on 3rd November that the report was waiting on an update from DEFRA, writing, 'Indeed, it has been an extraordinarily long time since the air quality steering group met with members. I understand, as you outlined below, officers are waiting on an update from DEFRA, ratifying our data. I'm sure you will agree, presenting an incomplete report does not benefit anyone.' Cllr Banks agreed that she had written that, and was still hopeful to receive confirmation from DEFRA that the Northchurch air quality management could be withdrawn due to the improvement of air quality there, which would then be brought to scrutiny.

Cllr Freedman noted that some venues with popular artists had experienced difficulties dealing with larger events, and wondered if it was on the agenda to look at the provision of an arts and performing space within the borough. Cllr Banks stated that it was not currently on the agenda, but if partners who wanted to deliver such a facility were identified, it would be welcomed.

Cllr Guest wondered if it was agreed that Christmas light switch-on events bring people together and helped to build community spirit. Cllr Banks agreed that they did,

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and had been a huge success this year, particularly following lockdowns, and noted that they showed the council's commitment to community engagement.

Cllr Harden asked for clarification on where the map for resources such as warm spaces could be found. Cllr Banks reiterated that these are available on the Hertfordshire County Council website, under Cost of Living on the DBC website, and that there are also national websites that locate resources based on postcode, and encouraged members to share information with residents.

Cllr Tindall wondered how the information was being distributed to the 15% not on the internet. Cllr Banks noted that the information has been included in the Dacorum Life, and that downloadable posters on the council websites are being used by the community centre network. Community Action Dacorum have also issued a number of leaflets to promote away from social media and website correspondence, and Cllr Griffiths confirmed that drivers have been issued these to pass to their passengers.

**Actions:**

- Cllr Banks to convey thanks and appreciation to colleagues in the voluntary sector.

**Cllr Anderson – Portfolio Holder Place**

In regard to Place, planning permission for Marshcroft, a proposal to build 1,400 houses to the north-east of Tring, has been refused. The appeal starts on 7th March, and is expected to last 16 days. Following the lifting of the moratorium, the council has started considering its first housing scheme since, and working through the backlog. Cllr Anderson noted that the proposal to adopt the Kings Langley neighbourhood plan is later on the agenda, and is the second such plan to be approved after Grovehill. The plans enable local communities to have more say on the design of developments in their area, and to keep more community infrastructure levy funding. Abingdon is also currently working through the process.

In regard to Economic Development, the business improvement district in the centre of Hemel has been confirmed for another five years following a successful ballot. The council's economic recovery plan continues, and the government has advised that the UK Share Prosperity Fund funding has been confirmed, expected in April. The team have also been in overdrive in regard to the situation with Amazon, and helping those affected.

In regard to Hemel Place, the Think Hemel consultation has closed, and the results are being analysed. Unfortunately the independent chair, Andrew Percival, is moving abroad, and will be replaced by Bob Lane, who is also the independent chair of the Hemel Garden Communities Board. The Thinking Place steering group for Tring is progressing well. Berkhamsted isn't as advanced, but work is continuing.

In regard to Hemel Hempstead Old Town strategy, phase two of planters and other public realm improvements are continuing.

In regard to Hemel Gardens Community, next week's board meeting will consider the framework plan and associated documents to keep the project going.

In regard to Commercial Assets, performance is still strong, with occupancy above 95% and income 8% above budget. The council is taking a constructive approach to debtors, running at about 18% debt, and braced in case the situation worsens. Cllr Anderson noted that this will be transferring to Cllr Williams going forward.

In regard to Poppy Fields Cemetery, drainage remedial work is complete, and the Environment Agency has started to determine the drainage application, but better weather is needed before laying the tarmac for the car park.

Cllr Anderson noted that Housing Development has transferred to Cllr Griffiths.

Cllr England wondered if the Michael McIntyre episode would give the council more confidence to reconsider plans for a new arts venue in Hemel. Cllr Anderson noted that, whilst a demonstration of making the best of what's available, it did not provide additional resources for a new venue. Cllr England further wondered what conversations had been had with residents groups about engaging with residents to try and make the resources possible. Cllr Anderson noted that it was straying into Cllr Banks' portfolio, but that early indicators from the Think Hemel exercise showed a performing arts venue as very low on people's agendas compared to the desire for green and open spaces.

### **Cllr Elliot – Portfolio Holder Corporate Services**

In regard to Finance, the team has been extremely busy since November, firstly in the preparation and delivery of the council's draft 23-24 budget scrutiny papers in December, and currently in preparation for the February scrutiny and cabinet budget papers. Provisional local government finance settlement was released by DLUHC prior to Christmas, and has provided additional short-term funding for Dacorum in 2023 that will be detailed at the next budget scrutiny session. The team successfully published the final audited accounts for 21-22 at the end of November, in line with government requirements, and once again outperforming the vast majority of local authorities. The team continues to work close with the Place and Commercial teams on the development of a Place strategy, and a Commercial full business case, to develop the basis of the council's future strategy.

In regard to Revenue and Benefits, the Council Tax, Business Rates, and Benefits team continues with the important work of administering residents and businesses' accounts, ensuring information is kept up to date. They are also preparing for the annual process to update benefit awards, and send out next year's business rates and council tax bills in March. This includes the first full revaluation of business rates since 2017, with the valuation office reviewing rateable values of every commercial property throughout England and Wales. The 2023 business rates revaluation has resulted in an average increase in business rates in Dacorum of 27.9% prior to transitional arrangements, and increased queries are expected as a result. The revenue service is awaiting government policy and processes detailing additional energy support

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schemes due to be implemented imminently, and the council will respond to these policies accordingly.

In regard to Legal and Democratic services, the legal team continues to support the core council service delivery and key corporate strategies to support the statutory and registered frameworks in place. The elections team completed the annual canvas for 2022, and the revised electoral register was published on 1st December. The final response rate was 94%, and the distribution of the register has been completed. The licensing team continues to monitor compliance with taxi licensing requirements, and had cause to revoke one licence due to alleged misconduct. The revocation was challenged at Magistrates Court, but the council successfully defended the decision, and the appeal was dismissed. There were no major issues relating to the operation of licensed premises over the Christmas and New Year season.

In regard to People and Transformation, good progress is being made, with new digital people and communication strategies agreed by cabinet and moved to implementation, marking an important step forward for transformation ambitions. The digital and comms team have been heavily involved in the successful design and launch of the Garden Waste Subscription Service, which went live on 4th January, and continue to drive investment in filming in Dacorum. On Friday 23rd December, Dacorum featured in the Christmas special of the second series of the hit BBC comedy, The Cleaner, with locations including Berkhamsted, Boxmoor, the Market Square, Warners End, and the Forum. On New Year's Day, Sky screened a comedy drama, Romantic Getaway, which featured various locations around Hemel Hempstead, and Dacorum also played a starring role in the premier of festive rom-com This Is Christmas on Sky Cinema. Work on recruitment and retention continues apace, with a number of successful appointees due to start with the council imminently. A market force policy will be brought to scrutiny in February, with a view to enable faster responses to an ever changing jobs market.

Cllr Symington wondered what plans were for the £17 million of CIL money, in terms of spending and spending priorities. Cllr Elliot noted that discussions were ongoing, and papers would be at the next scrutiny committee.

Cllr Pringle wondered whether there were any statistics for incidents or allegations of voter fraud in the in-person casting of ballots in previous elections in Dacorum. Cllr Elliot noted that voter ID was being brought in to stop fraud, but that some councils who had piloted the scheme had found turnout dropped by as much as a third and so the need for photo ID was being publicised accordingly, along with the information that the government website provides a means of getting photo ID in the absence of a driving licence or passport. Cllr Elliot noted that voter fraud statistics were not his area, and so he did not have that information to hand. Cllr Pringle wondered what would happen if someone's passport was out of date, and also expressed concern at the apparent lack of evidence supporting the policy, and consequently whether it should be protested as a White Elephant. Cllr Elliot confirmed that out of date passports can be used, noting that the decision had been made at a national level and statistics are not held locally, and reiterated that ID can be requested very quickly, for free, online.

Cllr Tindall wondered whether any decisions had been made regarding additional information being provided to households, such as the available cost of living support measures, along with the council tax revaluation, as this would ensure all households had received the information. Cllr Elliot noted that the information was in Dacorum Life, but would look into the idea.

Cllr Freedman wondered if Cllr Elliot would like to refer Cllr Pringle's question to the Leader of the Council, as he had previously provided information on voter fraud in the 2019 general election, and 2018 borough election. Cllr Williams noted that he couldn't recall the email in question, but expressed the view that a lot of voter fraud would only be detected if the presiding officer knew the individual in question, and was therefore in support of voter ID.

Cllr England noted that the alternative funding model for waste services, totaling £7 million across Hertfordshire, was withdrawn, and wondered what DBC's approximate share of the lost funding was. Cllr Elliot gave an uncertain estimate of £200,000 and agreed to follow up with the precise amount.

Cllr Hollinghurst wondered what percentage of voters in the borough did not have passports, and what percentage did not have driving licences. Cllr Elliot reiterated that the level of voter fraud was not known, and that it only took 3 minutes on the government website to apply for free ID. Cllr Hollinghurst noted that it could be done at the polling station.

**Actions:**

- Cllr Elliot to look into potentially including additional information with the council tax revaluation information for households.
- Cllr Elliot to follow up with Cllr England regarding DBC's share of the withdrawn alternative funding model for waste services.

## **5 MOTIONS**

### **5.1. MOTION ONE Proposed by Councillor Sheron Wilkie**

The survey conducted by Landman Economics for TUC was widely reported in November. Highlights show that key worker poverty is rising, and child poverty has risen in key worker households, with 19% having children living in poverty. 9.4% of children with nurses as parents, over 70,000 children. 10.8% of children with teaching staff as parents, around 100,000 children. 11.8% of children with local government workers as parents, over 220,000 children. 25% of children with public transport workers as parents, 50,000 children. Within this context, this council (a) notes with concern that there is evidence some families are struggling in the current cost of living crisis, (b) acknowledges the extensive support through various government schemes that has benefited some lower-income households, (c) welcomes the largest ever increase in the national living rate wage of 9.7% from April, (d) recognises the work being undertaken by officers of the council with its voluntary and community partners to coordinate a local response to the crisis, (e) recognises that the cost of living project group is leading this activity in Dacorum and working closely with county colleagues,

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(f) supports the county council to ensure all children of school age have access to at least one nutritious meal a day.

Moved by Cllr Wilkie, seconded by Cllr Williams.

Cllr Harden raised a minor point of etiquette, and wondered if 'kids' could be converted to 'children' throughout. Cllr Wilkie was happy to make this amendment.

Cllr Griffiths noted that the issue is not just a public services one.

Cllr England noted that nurses, ambulance workers, train workers, and retail workers should be paid properly, and the cost of living crisis is a result of not doing so.

Cllr Peter suggested an amendment from 'poverty' to 'relative poverty' to keep things in perspective, and suggested not doing so was disrespectful to less fortunate individuals in second, third, and fourth-world countries. Cllr Barry-Mears noted that the UK has seen the death of a child from mould, and objected to the suggested amendment.

Cllr Williams noted that food banks are not new, and the support given by the government over the past 2.5 years has impacted national finances, leading to difficult decisions about where what money there is, is spent. Cllr Freedman agreed that food banks are not new, but noted that in-work poverty is.

Cllr Wilkie summarised that the figures are appalling and no one is happy about them, which is why everyone is there.

Motion carried unanimously.

## **5.2 MOTION TWO Proposed by Councillor Adrian England**

This council notes that Dacorum council is on track for 60% recycling by 2030, which is 4th in Hertfordshire. This council asks the council to set out an ambitious plan to increase the recycling percentage target by 2% each year to reach the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership target for 2030.

Moved by Cllr England, seconded by Cllr Freedman.

Cllr England noted a drafting error, and Cllr Tindall made a proposal to amend the motion wording, 'Hertfordshire Waste Partnership target for 2030' to be amended to 'Central Government target for 2035.'

Moved by Cllr Tindall, seconded by Cllr Freedman.

The Chair asked for those wishing to speak to the amended motion.

Cllr Barrett noted that DBC has had the fastest growing recycling rates in Hertfordshire over the last decade, and rates are expected to continue to improve through engagement and events. As government is currently proposing changes to the

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Environmental Act 2021, which could require a major redesign of waste collection services, and the borough doesn't have a 2035 target, which would need to be moved through council under the normal process, it was suggested that it was not appropriate to consider the motion as amended. Cllr Harden agreed that if the council was on track for its 2030 target, the need for the motion seemed unclear.

Cllr England explained that in council in November a reference was made to a 65% recycling target, which was believed at the time to be a Hertfordshire Waste Partnership target, and was used in the draft of the motion at question. However, further research found only a 65% target from central government, the link to which has been circulated. It was noted that the amendment was to clarify which target was being considered for adoption. Cllr Freedman agreed that the function of the motion was not being changed, only the reference to the target's origin, and why it was felt to be achievable. It was reiterated that DBC would only be committed to an increased target for 2030.

Cllr Douris interrupted with a point of order, and requested the entirety of the actual proposed motion be read.

The Chair put the motion to approve the amendment to vote. Motion failed, with 16 votes in favour, 28 votes against, and 1 abstention.

The Chair asked for those wishing to speak to the original motion.

Cllr Wilkie noted that the motion recognises what has been achieved, and that ambition is still needed. Cllr Williams objected that the motion merely reiterated council policy. A point of order was raised, and it was noted that making personal remarks is not appropriate. Cllr Barry-Mears noted that the amendment was for the target to be adjusted, and therefore wouldn't have been a reiteration.

Cllr Stevens noted that evidence showed the recycling rate had stalled around 52% in the past few years, and the proposal was to set up a trajectory to reach 60% or 65%, as while a policy might exist, progress was not being made, so the motion was to reinforce the message. Cllr England apologised for the confusion, and agreed that progress had stalled and no longer seemed sufficient to reach 60% by 2030.

The Chair put the original motion to vote. Motion failed, with 15 votes in favour, 27 votes against, and 2 abstentions.

### **5.3 MOTION THREE Proposed by Councillor Adrian England**

This council notes that just 17.8% of the funds available to residents in England and Wales for heat pump source grants have been claimed in the first three quarters of the life of the scheme. It is further noted that the value of the grants, at £5,000 each, would appear to be a deterrent to applicants in England and Wales. The council asks the portfolio holder to write to the government to ask for an improved and enhanced scheme, which will match the Scotland offer of £7,500 to £9,000 grants.

Moved by Cllr England, seconded by Cllr Williams.

Cllr Stevens noted that it was an opportunity to reaffirm a commitment to cutting carbon emissions, and referred to a retrofit academy initiative in Manchester, sponsored by the building industry, suggesting that the borough may wish to take a similar lead on developing potential in this area.

Cllr Williams noted that grant availability might not be holding people back, but that bigger grants may make people move forward, despite varying experiences of heat pump efficiency.

Cllr England noted that the UK has historically lagged behind heat pump adoption compared to other countries, and that policy will play a crucial role in accelerating UK heat pump progress. In addition, the flagship boiler upgrade scheme has just over two years left to achieve its target, but only 17.81% of its year one funding has been spent after nine months, indicating a raise in public profile is needed, perhaps using similar methods as those used to promote the Green Homes grant. Cllr England noted that, by agreement, the interest free loan has been removed from the motion.

Motion carried unanimously

## **6        QUESTIONS**

### **6.1 From Councillor Sally Symington to Councillor Margaret Griffiths**

Cllr Symington wondered how many properties within Dacorum's council-owned housing portfolio had an up-to-date EPC rating. Cllr Griffiths confirmed that DBS had 1,577 checked and verified EPC certificates. Cllr Symington further wondered how many of that 15% had an ABC rating. Cllr Griffiths noted that she didn't have those figures to hand. Cllr Symington additionally wondered how many properties were due to be retrofitted to improve the insulation, or if there was no policy to do that. Cllr Griffiths confirmed there is a policy for retrofitting, and noted that the EPC is not required unless selling, but will be included as part of the Whole Home surveys starting in April.

### **6.2 From Councillor Sally Symington to Councillor Margaret Griffiths**

Cllr Symington wondered how many reports of empty homes the council had received in the last three years. Cllr Griffiths noted that 19 to 20 homes had been reported date, via 33 complaints from the general public. Cllr Symington wondered what level of confidence Cllr Griffiths had in the reporting system, and noted that residents who had reported empty properties were also reporting a lack of response to those reports. Cllr Griffiths stated that she had 100% confidence in the process, and noted that the website had been upgraded in the last year, encouraging people to report, with one specific case that was missed being an ongoing case at the time. Cllr Symington additionally noted that Action on Empty Homes had identified 659 empty homes in Dacorum, and wondered what the cause of the discrepancy was. Cllr Griffiths noted

that she had not seen this information, and that the legal definition of empty is being used, that is, properties that can be evidenced to have been empty for two years.

Cllr Symington observed that cutting out question preamble leaves the portfolio holder without context, and unable to answer questions. Cllr Griffiths noted that the preamble information could have been sent beforehand. Cllr Symington confirmed that it had been submitted to the legal department, and suggested a revision to procedure.

**Actions:**

- Procedure to be revised, with question preamble sent to both the legal department and the portfolio holder prior to the meeting.

**6.3 From Councillor Sally Symington to Councillor Andrew Williams**

Cllr Symington noted that Dacorum only has one quarter the national average of public electric vehicle charge points, and wondered what actions Cllr Williams was taking to accelerate the installation of such devices across the borough's public car parks, and ensure their availability for residents without off-street parking. Cllr Williams noted the same question comes up frequently at scrutiny committees, and explained that the decision to work with two companies had been made in May 2022, leading to a funding submission at the end of October, with the expectation that a decision would be received in December, however the Energy Saving Trust had received a significant number of applications, and had not yet given an answer to the application, causing the delay. It was further noted that on street chargers were a matter for the Highway Authority, and any such schemes should be self-funding. Cllr Symington wondered when the project had gone from the two companies providing the finance in return for a long lease, to a project requiring grant funding. Cllr Williams agreed that the rapid chargers are being self-funded, but noted that the fast chargers had always been on the understanding that grant funding was available.

**7 BUSINESS FROM THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING**

None

**8 CABINET REFERRALS**

**CA/109/22 Kings Langley neighbourhood plan**

Cllr Williams moved. Cllr Griffiths seconded.

Agreed by the Council

**CA/110/22 Treasury management, the results recommended**

Cllr Williams moved. Cllr Griffiths seconded.

Agreed by the Council

**9 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REFERRALS**

No referrals.

**CHAIRMAN**

**10 CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

No changes to committee membership.

**11 CHANGE TO COMMITTEE DATES**

Cllr Williams noted that the annual council was originally on Wednesday 10th May after the elections, but this has been moved to Wednesday 17th May.

The Meeting ended at 9.59 pm

**CHAIRMAN**