

MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

11 OCTOBER 2023

Present:

Members:

Present:

Councillor Barry-Mears (Chair)
Councillor Capozzi (Vice-Chair)
Councillor McArevey
Councillor B Link
Councillor C Link
Councillor Cox

Councillor Pringle
Councillor Banks
Councillor Barradell
Councillor Adeleke
Councillor Johnson
Councillor B Williams
Councillor Pesch

Officers:

Natasha Beresford

Assistant Director - Housing Operations & Safe Communities

Mark Pinnell

Assistant Director Property

Mandy Peters

Humanitarian Response Programme Manager

Simon Walton

Interim Head of Strategy, Quality and Assurance

Kayley Johnston

Corporate & Democratic Support Officer (minutes)

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

66 **MINUTES**

The Chair advised that there were some amendments to the minutes from 13 September 2023 so will be agreed at the next meeting.

67 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mottershead, Weston and Wilkie.

68 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

69 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

70 **CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE**

COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN

None

71 HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

N Beresford introduced the report to members stating that the report was to inform Members of the current position in relation to humanitarian response activity and the Council's response in relation to resettlement and asylum cohorts.

N Beresford was happy to take questions.

Cllr Banks thanked N Beresford for an interesting insight to the report, she said that she had noticed from the front cover that it said all wards were affected but not all wards have refugee's settlement, could she elaborate on this.

N Beresford said that the reason for it being all wards is that they have three initial asylum contingency hotel sites, and an Arab hotel and they are in different wards of the Borough.

She said that the Asylum dispersal program specifically engages clear springs ready homes, which is the Home Office procurement agency to procure property in all wards in any Borough.

Dacorum has a ward allocation as a Borough of 113 bed spaces, those bed spaces could be procured in any area of Dacorum. Children are accommodated across the hotel sites and they're not necessarily in education placements specifically within the immediate locality of that site. They will be transported to and from school across the Borough.

N Beresford said that the other factor to draw your attention to is the ongoing impacts in relation to Asylums dispersals specifically. There is a direct link and knock onto those households who are occupying temporarily accommodation placement's and potential long impacts in respect or demand to housing register and request for homeless assistance. Generally speaking that would affect the wider Dacorum.

Cllr Adeleke said in addition to Afghanistan and Syria, given the crisis that is prevailing all over the world now, which countries are we actually supporting or planning to support.

N Beresford said that currently across each of the sites we are managing there are anywhere between 12 and 25 different nationalities across those sites.

Cllr Barradell referred to the Syrian VPRP scheme, he notes that the Council have resettled 9 out of 10 households. He asked if there were any plans to resettle a tenth.

M Peters confirmed that there are still plans and they are committed, however events have taken over and the Syrian resettlement programme is practically on hold at the moment.

Cllr Barradell asked if there is any expectation on this sort of service, given recent activities and issues and everything that is going on in Israel and Gaza that could lead to a demand for the service.

N Beresford said that it fluctuates in position and that they meet with the Home Office deluc colleagues both nationally and regionally on a weekly and monthly basis. It is a watching brief and it's a likeliness.

Cllr Barradell then referred to section 7, your safeguarding work. He wondered what specifically the Council are doing around recognizing potential victims of modern slavery coming through the councils housing programme and what we are doing to recognise victims and then referring them to the LRM on the duties notified.

N Beresford said that the council have a dedicated safeguarding lead officer and the works within the safe community service. She provides direct support and advice to the wider organisation, not just the safe community services, in relation to all aspects of safeguarding and modern slavery.

So for example, aspects of safeguarding modern slavery in relation to contract procurement, management of workforce, but also direct response to our residents and customers when there are issues instances. So currently with support of Safeguarding Lead and Hertfordshire and prevent protecting, we are scoping a dedicated training session for all humanitarian response staff operating and working with households and through our program. They are also extending that offer of support to all staff working in and around those sites in declaring they may not specifically be Dacorum staff. They will be working with Hertfordshire County Council staff, voluntary sector staff and also Home Office procured staff and managing agents to deliver those services.

They do have a single point of contact in the team and a dedicated mailbox for reporting which follows through the NRM framework and we also are engaged productively with Hertfordshire safeguarding adults and children program, which has a suite of action we need to undertake in relation to our safeguarding policy, that's reported through to SLT or name called patient objects on coarsely basis and in terms of our responses and key actions.

She stated that there is no responsibility specifically for the service, it's a partnership and delivery framework. M Peters added to that and said, they have their own safeguarding protocols along with the Strategic Migration Partnership, so they work very closely together in relation to what's happening within hotels etc, being able to manage those situations as and when they arise.

72 HTIP PROGRESS REPORT

S Walton introduced the report. Stating, it was to bring to your attention where we are with the HTIP, what it is, what we're trying to do and where we're at. Its been brought in to transform the housing service in preparation for changes in legislation and regulation, but fundamentally I think we all agree they are worthwhile things to implement anyway to improve the services to residents.

HTIP are consultants who come in to assist our own managers, improve their areas and think that's an important point to make. That's the right way to embed sustainable change because we're learning with them and currently all the areas

which they're working on have active action plans which are up to date live documents.

S Walton was happy to take questions.

Cllr Johnson referred to section 3 it talks about applying rent tolerances. He recalls from an earlier session they had a few years ago this was in terms of social housing, there's a flexibility permitted of between 5 and 10%, but I can't remember the basis on which that can be applied. Could this be clarified?

S Walton said, what we are doing with HTIP is looking ahead, linking improvements with the housing strategy. This means we can position the service with the Councils aspirations, but also recognize that like most other housing organisations, we've got the issue about funding and we will need to balance this off. So it's trying to marry up what we want to do to be a great landlord and where we are now with business planning, and make sure those things dovetail, any option to increase income would be looked at in the round.

The chair said that the report speaks for itself and the committee are happy for them to come back in 6 months with an update.

The report was noted.

73 REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

M Pinnell gave an overview on the report. Stating that the recommendations of the report are to receive authorization from the committee to set up a task and finish group to support the recommission of the repairs and maintenance contracts. Section one of the report is the introduction and he highlighted to Members that table one, because that's the existing services that are provided under the banner of the total asset management contract, moving forward the total asset management label will be dropped and we'll have the repairs and maintenance reference carried through subsequent and future reports.

Section 2 of the report is the meet and the request, so part of the recommission exercise for the repairs and maintenance contract.

Section 2.3 of the report refers to the Dacorum Constitution and outlines the purpose, the request through this scrutiny group of setting up that report task and finish group. He said that the report states how it should be set up and the proposal.

M Pinnell welcomed questions.

Cllr Pringle arrived at 19:47

Cllr Banks said that on behalf of the conservative Team they welcome the Task and Finish Group.

Cllr Barradell asked if the meeting will be minuted and made public or is it a closed group.

M Pinnell referred to 2.4 of the report and said that it will be minute but not publicly scrutinised.

The Chair added that this report will come to the committee every 6 months.

Cllr Adeleke asked why we are leaving out independent.

M Pinnell said that he had gone through the governance team and Mark Brookes and he has said that we can invite independent people, so they wont be left out. He stated that it would be a minimum of 6 rather than a maximum of 6.

Cllr Adeleke asked if they will be invited or selected.

M Pinnell said that if the committee this evening approves the setting up of the task and finish, we will write out to all group leaders to nominate councillors to be part of the task and finish Group.

The committee agreed the recommendations.

74 FORWARD PLAN

The work programme was agreed.

Cllr Banks asked if we could add climate change to the forward plan as it's a new team.

75 ACTION POINTS

Noted

The Meeting ended at 7.58 pm