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HOUSING AND COMMUNITY INTERVIEW AND SCRUTINY AGENDA

**WEDNESDAY 15 JANUARY 2025 AT 7.30 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 2 - THE FORUM**

Membership

Councillor Catherine McAreyve (Chair)	Councillor Alan Johnson
Councillor Barbara Pesch (Vice-Chairman)	Councillor Carrie Link
Councillor Gbola Adeleke	Councillor Jan Maddern
Councillor Julie Banks	Councillor Lara Pringle
Councillor Sammy Barry-Mears	Councillor Garrick Stevens
Councillor Edward Barradell	Councillor Sally Symington
Councillor David Deacon	Councillor Belinda Williams

For further information, please contact Corporate and Democratic Support or 01442 228209

AGENDA

- 1 MINUTES** (Pages 3 - 5)
To confirm the minutes and decisions from the previous meeting
- 2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
To receive any apologies for absence
- 3 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]

4 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

An opportunity for members of the public to make statements and ask questions in accordance with the rules as to Public Participation

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

6 ACTION POINTS FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Page 6)

7 WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 7 - 8)

8 SCRUTINY REVIEW (Pages 9 - 33)

9 BUILDING SAFETY UPDATE (Pages 34 - 41)

10 RESPONSIVE REPAIRS UPDATE (Pages 42 - 50)

MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

4 DECEMBER 2024

Present:

Members:

Councillors: McArevey (Chair)
Pesch (Vice-Chairman)
Adeleke
Banks
Barradell
Johnson
Link
Maddern
Symington
Williams
Dhyani – Portfolio Holder – Housing & Property Service

Officers:

Natasha Beresford	Assistant Director - Housing Operations & Safe Communities
Dan Thurlow	Head of Asset Management
Ryan Glanville	Assistant Head of Housing Operations
Darren Welsh	Housing and Property Services
Oliver Jackson	Head of Housing Operations
Hannah Peacock	Head of Strategy, Quality and Assurance
David Barrett	Assistant Director - Strategic Housing and Delivery
Joe Bowden	Financial Planning and Analysis Manager
Andrew Linden	Head of Commercial Housing Contracts
Kayley Johnston	Corporate & Democratic Support Officer (minutes)

The meeting began at 8.10 pm

74 **MINUTES**

The minutes held on Wednesday 20 November 2024 were confirmed and agreed by the Members present.

75 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Deacon, Councillor Stevens and Link.

76 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations.

77 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None.

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

None

79 **ACTION POINTS FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Please refer to the video minutes for the full discussion.

The action points were agreed by Members.

80 **WORK PROGRAMME**

Please refer to the video minutes for the full discussion.

The work programme was agreed by Members.

81 **DRAFT 2025/26 BUDGET PROPOSALS**

Please refer to the video minutes for the full discussion.

The report was agreed and noted by Members.

82 **TENANCY AGREEMENT REVIEW**

Please refer to the video minutes for the full discussion.

The report was agreed and noted by Members.

83 **SUPPORTED HOUSING STRATEGY**

Please refer to the video minutes for the full discussion.

The report was agreed and noted by Members.

84 **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2025 UPDATE**

Please refer to the video minutes for the full discussion.

The report was agreed and noted by Members.

The Meeting ended at 10:00

Housing and Community OSC

Actions arising – 2024-2025

Date of meeting	Action point	Responsible for action	Date action completed	Update on action point
<u>20/11/2024</u>	NB to share figures in response to Cllr Barradell question.	N Beresford	20/11/2024	Email sent
<u>20/11/2024</u>	JB to feedback figures for cllr Adeleke	Joe Bowden		Email sent 11/12/24
<u>20/11/2024</u>	NB to arrange a domestic abuse update	NB		Session has been set up for April

Agenda Item 7

H&C OSC Work Programme 2024/2025

Meeting Date	Report Deadline	Items	Contact Details	Background information
15 Jan 2025	3 Jan 2025			
		Action Points (from previous meeting)		
		Scrutiny Review	Mark Brookes Assistant Director Legal & Democratic Services Mark.brookes@dacorum.gov.uk	
		Building Safety Update	Ricky Lang Head of Safe Homes Ricky.lang@Dacorum.gov.uk	
		Responsive Repairs Update	Dan Thurlow Head of Asset Management Dan.thurlow@dacorum.gov.uk	
5 Feb 2025	24 Jan 2025	Action Points (from previous meeting)		
		Joint Budget <i>Ideally no further items to be added</i>		
		Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy	Natasha Beresford Assistant Director - Housing Operations & Safe Communities Natasha.beresford@dacorum.gov.uk Joshua Smith Head of Safe Communities Joshua.smith@dacorum.gov.uk	

12 March 2025	28 Feb 2025	Action Points (from previous meeting)		
		Q3 Quarterly Budget Monitoring Report	Fiona Jump – Head of Financial Services Fiona.jump@dacorum.gov.uk	<i>To review and scrutinise quarterly performance</i>
		Q3 Housing Performance & Tenants 'Voice Report	David Barrett – Assistant Director – Strategic Housing and Delivery David.barrett@dacorum.gov.uk Mark Pinnell – Assistant Director Property and Place Mark.pinnell@dacorum.gov.uk Natasha Beresford – Assistant Director Housing Operations and Safer Communities Natasha.beresford@dacorum.gov.uk	<i>To review and scrutinise quarterly performance</i>

Public place protection order Revision -. Date tbc

Cultural Strategy - Diane – TBC

Rent Policy Update – Oliver Jackson – TBC

Add climate change (from Oct minutes)



HOUSING AND COMMUNITY

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report for:	Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Title of report:	Scrutiny: Recommendations following the Review of Scrutiny by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny
Date:	15th January 2025
Report on behalf of:	Councillor William Allen, Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Commercial Services
Part:	I
If Part II, reason:	N/A
Appendices:	Review report from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) (appendix 1) Scrutiny Scoring Criteria (appendix 2) Committee Timetable for 2025/26 (Appendix 3)
Background papers:	None
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)

Report Author / Responsible Officer

Mark Brookes, Assistant Director (Legal and Democratic Services)



Mark.brookes@dacorum.gov.uk / 01442 228236 (ext. 2236)

Corporate Priorities	<p>Community engagement: Engage with residents and partners to have a real say on our services and the borough.</p> <p>Service improvement and delivery: Running the Council efficiently and putting residents at the heart of everything we do.</p> <p>Sustainable future: Take action on the Climate and Ecological Emergency</p>
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Wards affected	ALL
Purpose of the report:	For committee to consider the recommendations for the future operation of the scrutiny function and alignment of Cabinet and Council meetings.
Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):	(1) That committee considers and agrees the action plan supporting each recommendation in the report. (2) That committee notes the proposed revised committee timetable (Appendix 3)
Period for post policy/project review:	The changes proposed in this report will be kept under continuous review and reported to Cabinet and Council if further changes are required.

1. Background

- 1.1 In the autumn of 2023, the Council commissioned the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to undertake a review of the Council's scrutiny function. The review took place between October and December last year and resulted in the report and recommendations attached as Appendix 1. The review was largely positive about how Scrutiny is carried out at the Council, recognising a good level of engagement and a willingness for the scrutiny function to develop and evolve. The report puts forward suggestions for change so that the function can become more productive and effective.
- 1.2 The reports sets out the recommendations from CfGS in bold in section 2 below and an action plan has been drafted, by the author of this report, to propose how the Council can put the recommendations into best effect.
- 1.3 In summary, the review did not suggest that the current model of three scrutiny committees is changed, but that those committees focus on thematic work rather than dive into more operational/performance detail, achieved by an annual plan for each committee.
- 1.4 It is proposed that Scrutiny committee meetings will be tied into the programme of Cabinet and Council meetings and reduced to five Scrutiny meetings a year for each committee plus the Scrutiny budget meeting in December with an optional second meeting in January or February if there are any material changes to the budget presented in December.
- 1.5 It is proposed to realign the timetable for Cabinet and Council to follow the scrutiny cycle and reduce the number of Cabinet meetings from 11 to 5. Provision will be made in the Committee Timetable for an additional 5 'contingency' Cabinet meetings in case they are needed for urgent business, which cannot meet publication deadlines for the main meetings, but otherwise these meetings will not be used.

Council will continue to have 5 meetings plus the Annual Council as it does at present. Audit Committee will also be reduced from 6 to 5 meetings for consistency.

- 1.6 It is proposed that a new Members' portal will be developed to share service performance information, service updates, report scrutiny progress and for Member development and training, which will allow more time for scrutiny meetings to focus on broader corporate and strategic matters, which can add greater value to the Council.

Background: frequency of meetings and agenda sizes

- 1.7 Currently, the Council has seven main Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings for each committee plus two joint budget scrutiny meetings, eleven Cabinet meetings, and five full Council meetings plus Annual Council. The Council also has six audit meetings.
- 1.8 Over the period from September 2023 to July 2024, Cabinet averaged 6 reports per meeting with an average meeting duration of 20 minutes. Finance and Resources OSC averaged 6 items over 7 meetings during this time frame with an average meeting time of 1h:13 mins, Housing and Community OSC 6 reports with an average meeting time of 56 minutes, Strategic Planning and Environment OSC (SPAEC) averaged 5 items a meeting with an average meeting time of 1h:51 mins. The number of reports for Scrutiny meetings includes the quarterly performance reports which would be removed from agendas but a more condensed performance report will still come twice a year to scrutiny meetings. Full data is set out at the end of this report for each meeting over the last 12 months; including the start and finish times for each meeting.

2. Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Recommendation 1

Consider how the scrutiny committee structure could be reprofiled to allow for more in-depth scrutiny work. We recommend that the current structure of three committees is maintained, but are clearly articulated and that the frequency of formal meetings is reviewed to provide the space for more Member led, strategic scrutiny to take place. (Whilst noting that this could require review of all Council committees).

2.1 Summary of action plan proposals:

- ❖ Reduce to five Overview and Scrutiny meetings per committee plus one budget meeting, with an optional second budget in January/February meeting if there are material changes to the budget presented in December.
- ❖ Realign Cabinet and Council to follow each Scrutiny meeting, reducing the number of Cabinet meetings to five per annum from eleven (plus 5 contingency meetings) Council to five, plus Annual Council (remains the same number) and Audit to five meetings from six. Please see annexed to this report a proposed revised committee timetable for 2025/26.

The timing of the implementation of the new timetable will take effect from May 2025, if agreed by Members.

- ❖ Committee to focus on more strategic thematic issues and reduce time spent on service performance updates.
- ❖ Quarterly Performance reports for service areas to be distributed via a newly developed Members' Portal so Members can raise questions through the Portal and receive answers, as required, outside meetings. Following feedback from Members through Group briefings, it is proposed that there will still be two meetings each year which will have a dedicated section for formal performance reporting.

- 2.3 The review recognised that there is a tendency at the Scrutiny committees for Members to focus too much into the operational detail of the services rather than on more strategic issues. This can mean that the meetings become too bogged down in the details of delivery; which can be addressed elsewhere (see below).
- 2.4 To address this, it is recommended that an annual plan is drawn up for each Scrutiny Committee; with a plan for the key areas upon which the committee wishes to focus over the year; Scrutiny chairs will need to liaise in advance of the finalisation of the plans to ensure that there is no duplication across committees. There will still remain the opportunity to add pre-Cabinet scrutiny reports as currently exists.
- 2.5 At present, each Scrutiny Committee meets nine times in each municipal year. This is very frequent and the review identified that this was more than many councils, and has significant implications upon the time required from Members and officers and the Council resources that this frequency consumes. It is proposed that, in future, each committee meets five times per year (plus a budget scrutiny meeting) and that these meetings precede the Cabinet meetings (also reduced in frequency to five main meetings); which will in turn be followed by meetings of Council.
- 2.6 If this proposal is adopted, it is proposed that the meetings are divided into two distinct parts. The first part will cover scrutiny of the relevant Cabinet reports. The second part will be devoted to discussing the thematic work of the Committee. Examples of the type of thematic work may include focussed review of the work or particular service areas within the remit of the Committee, delivery against corporate plan objectives falling within the remit of the Committee, new or growing areas of customer demand in the area. These are just a few examples, but themes will be developed and discussed with Scrutiny chairs/vice chairs and agreed with the wider Committee.
- 2.7 These changes will also free up time for Members to have specific working/task and finish groups to look into the identified issues in more depth if required and should add value to the scrutiny function.
- 2.8 Finally, whilst it is not felt a good use of time for Members to go into operational performance detail at committee, it is recognised that it is entirely right for Members to be aware of performance matters across service areas. Accordingly, details of performance across the Council will be available through a new Members' Portal, which will enable Members to raise questions with the relevant senior officer if they have

concerns and for answers to be provided through the Portal. Performance reports may also assist Members to consider particular work areas where they may like to request a specific 'deep dive' report at a future meeting. It is still proposed that that Scrutiny committees allocate part of two of their meetings annually to consider service performance against key performance indicators and this will be considered further as the workplans are developed.

3. Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Recommendation 2

Developing regular communication between Scrutiny Chairs. This could be achieved through default position of sharing work programmes and insight on working practices. This should also engage the Chair of Audit and Cabinet Members to highlight future issues and the part which Scrutiny could play in testing and shaping these forward plans.

3.1 Summary of action plan proposals

- ❖ Scrutiny chairs/vice chairs to agree overall work programme and programme for each committee. This will involve attendance at one main work planning workshop each year plus quarterly reviews where initial work plan ideas will be developed.
- ❖ Workplans will be shared electronically on the Members' Portal to ensure that Chairs have oversight of each other's workplans and eliminate duplication.

3.2 The review pointed out that there was insufficient communication between the Scrutiny Chairs, risking duplication across the work programmes of the three committees. To reduce the risk of this the chairs will meet before the work programmes are finalised at an annual workplanning workshop to agree what the overall thematic scrutiny programme should look like over the following year. Quarterly work planning review meetings will take place with Chairs and lead service officers (Strategic Directors, ADs or Heads of Service) to review workplans and ensure they are up to date. Workplans will then be shared amongst all Chairs on the Members' Portal.

3.3 Quarterly meetings of chairs can monitor progression, aided by a portal for chairs and vice chairs set up on the Members' portal so that the overall workplan and progress for each committee can be more easily monitored.

4. Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Recommendation 3

Develop an awareness raising programme for Members and Officers. This should be in addition to the current package of learning and development support for Elected Members and Officers across the Council. Wider awareness raising should be explored to build, refresh and enhance organisational knowledge and understanding of the role, purpose, and powers of scrutiny. This should be built into induction training for new Elected Members and include officer support for drafting and presenting reports to committee.

4.1 Summary of action plan proposals

- ❖ Induction training for all new Members will be provided as part of the Member development programme. This is currently part of the Member induction programme and will be retained.
- ❖ In addition, the Members' Portal will be used to give a range of short written briefings and video training opportunities on relevant scrutiny matters.
- ❖ Opportunities will be considered for short briefings before scrutiny meetings where appropriate. For example, this could be scrutiny governance/process training, general scrutiny skills, or finance updates if required.

4.2 As the review recognised, the Council already has a substantial Member training programme. However, building in short briefing sessions, whether in person or on-line, on matters which are of relevance to the functions of the committee or relating to matters the committee will be discussing at the meeting, or possibly at forthcoming meetings, will be actioned.

5. Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Recommendation 4

Review the process for developing work plans for each Scrutiny committee. Engaging Members, Officers, partners, and the public to inform work programming and to prioritise the topics for review in a proportionate way. This should include planned space for the detailed scrutiny of forthcoming decisions alongside the capacity to conduct in-depth scrutiny outside of the formal meetings.

5.1 Summary of action plan proposals

- ❖ February - Annual call for workplan ideas for Councillors and the public
- ❖ March/April - Annual work planning workshops with Scrutiny chairs/vice-chairs to help select and prioritise workplans..

Members will still be able to raise ideas for new items at each meeting, which will be subject to assessment in accordance with the workplan selection tool to help select and prioritise workplan matters (see proposal in see Appendix 2).

5.2 The idea behind this is to enable Scrutiny Committees to focus on the activities that will impact most beneficially on the Council's corporate priorities and/or matters of significant local concern. This will need to be adjusted from time to time in line with other changes so that alignment is achieved across the Council's activities and overall priorities.

5.3 The workplan selection tool will enable Scrutiny chairs/vice chairs to prioritise the different ideas and select appropriate items to ensure time for more in depth scrutiny into items which can make a real difference to the Council. The annual workplan will give officers advanced notice and time to develop reports.

- 5.4 The annual 'call' for workplan ideas will give an opportunity for the public and Councillors to submit ideas for scrutiny – this could be done through the Council's on-line engagement platform, which can then be assessed through the workplan selection tool and agreed between chairs/vice-chairs and senior officers for agreement by Committee. It will also allow chairs and vice-chairs the opportunity to consider inviting individuals, groups or stakeholders to appear at Committee to give their views on matters where relevant and agreed with senior officers.

6. Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Recommendation 5

Create a regular information digest for all Elected Members. This would provide the opportunity for Members to be cited on performance data and other high-profile work which is for information rather than taking up space on the formal agenda. This digest should also be used to identify those issues which may require further in-depth investigation.

6.1 Summary of action plan proposals

- ❖ This will be achieved through the development of a new Members' Portal.

- 6.2 The greater use of the Members' Portal referred to above will provide a resource for Members. It is intended that this will be developed (as outlined above) to include performance information on services (similar to current performance reports but more concise) to enable Members, should they wish, to both interrogate this information and be interactive, enabling Members to raise questions and issues, and make suggestions, directly through to the relevant senior officers.

- 6.3 Members will be able to identify through the portal, the performance information that they would find most useful and comparison data can be developed, enabling benchmarking internally as well as externally. Details of and knowledge shared in the training sessions referred to above will also be included on this portal.

- 6.4 The Portal will also be used to promote training opportunities, provide on-line video recordings of training provided for review and enable Members to track training they have attended and are required to attend (mandatory courses).

7. Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Recommendation 6

Review the content and detail for scrutiny reports and briefings. This would ensure consistency of communication and reporting formats as well as help focus on purpose of an item for consideration by scrutiny and expectations of the level of detailed contained within agenda packs. This could be done alongside Elected Members and officers so that all parties were clear on expectations and content.

7.1 Summary of action plan proposals

- ❖ The template for Scrutiny meeting agendas and reports will be reviewed in the light of the finalised action plan for the other recommendations (including Recommendation 7 below).
- ❖ The aim will be to create a more inclusive template, which can prompt debate and discussion.
- ❖ The structure of performance reports/updates to go on the Portal will also be reviewed and agreed with the Performance Team to ensure they are concise and give members an overview of the service area.

8. Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Recommendation 7

Reviewing how the recommendations are made and how impact is measured. This could include a process for any recommendations made being captured and reported back to Scrutiny to show how Cabinet has reflected on comments made and to orientate towards outcomes-focused meetings. This recommendation will be important following the review of work programming and the space having been provided for in-depth scrutiny work.

8.1 Summary of action plan proposals

- ❖ Committee agendas will include standard agenda items noting how recommendations from Scrutiny have been progressed, if they have been acted upon, and what the impact has been.

8.2 The review reflected that there was comparatively little public participation in the work of the Committees. This can be improved by identifying experts who could add value when the Committee is considering certain issues. More public participation, and the wider communication about the desire for this and how it can be achieved, both in looking at subjects and assessing impact from scrutiny work, would broaden the involvement with the public and enable greater resident input into the work of the Council.

9. Audit Committee

9.1 Whilst the report mentioned the role of the Audit Committee, it did not contain any recommendations about its operation. Nonetheless, the role of the Audit Committee is an important one and one that is rightly separate from both Cabinet and Scrutiny.

9.2 It is recommended that there be greater oversight of workplans between Audit and Scrutiny chairs to ensure that there is no duplication of work. This can be facilitated through the Members' Portal. It is also recommended that the frequency of Audit Committee is reduced to five meetings from six so that meetings can be timetabled in a consistent format to Scrutiny, Cabinet and Council meetings. This recommendation has been discussed with the S.151 officer who has no specific concerns subject to agreeing final timetabling.

10. Options

10.1 The Council could decide to continue with the current way in which scrutiny operates or could decide to adopt a different approach other than that recommended by the review.

10.2 Consideration has been given to other formats for scrutiny including reducing the number of Scrutiny Committees to one or two main committees rather than the current three. The CfGS believed that the

current structure of three committees worked well and whilst some authorities do adopt different approaches, including some who only have one committee, the view of CfGS is that this can cause work planning issues as there may not be enough capacity to adequately scrutinise the full range of services that the Council provides. A smaller one or two committee structure may also mean Councillors could become disenfranchised as some will not be involved in the scrutiny process at all and would therefore miss the opportunity to become involved in strategy, policy and project development and to scrutinise matters which really matter to their constituents.

11. Risks

The role of scrutiny is important and a statutory function in a Local Authority that operates an executive model of governance, such as at Dacorum. It is a way of the wider Council holding the executive to account and so the scrutiny function must be kept up to date and must operate as effectively as possible. If sufficient resource is not devoted to the support of scrutiny, the governance of the Council is at risk with reputational and other consequences, including a lack of public confidence.

12. Conclusions

Subject to consideration by the three current Scrutiny Committees this report will be reported to Cabinet on 28th January for approval and onto Council for final approval on 19th February.

Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny meetings (excluding Joint Budget) 01/08/2023 to 31/08/2024

	Meeting Date	Start time	Finish time	Meeting duration	No. of reports
Cabinet	12/09/23	19:30	19:44	00:14	7
	17/10/23	19:30	19:57	00:27	8
	21/11/23	19:30	19:40	00:10	3
	12/12/23	19:30	19:50	00:20	6
	30/01/24	19:30	19:45	00:15	7
	13/02/24	19:30	20:00	00:30	10
	19/03/24	19:30	19:33	00:03	4
	23/04/24	19:30	20:00	00:30	5
	21/05/24	19:30	20:00	00:30	6
	18/06/24	19:30	19:38	00:08	4
	23/07/24	19:30	20:00	00:30	8

Cabinet average duration of meeting = 00:19

Cabinet average number of reports per meeting = 6

	Meeting Date	Start time	Finish time	Meeting duration	No. of reports	
Finance & Resources OSC	05/09/23	19:30	20:35	01:05	7	
	03/10/23	19:30	20:21	00:51	4	
	07/11/23	19:30	20:44	01:14	6	
	09/01/24	Meeting cancelled				
	05/03/24	19:30	21:17	01:47	8	
	04/06/24	19:30	20:30	01:00	5	
	15/07/24	19:30	20:56	01:26	5	

F&R OSC average duration of meeting = 01:13

F&R OSC average number of reports per meeting = 6

	Meeting Date	Start time	Finish time	Meeting duration	No. of reports
Housing & Community OSC	13/09/23	19:30	20:20	00:50	8
	11/10/23	19:30	19:58	00:28	5
	08/11/23	19:30	20:10	00:40	5
	17/01/24	19:30	21:09	01:39	5
	13/03/24	19:30	20:30	01:00	9
	05/06/24	19:30	20:06	00:36	3
	15/07/24	19:30	20:55	01:25	5

H&C OSC average duration of meeting = 00:56

H&C OSC average number of reports per meeting = 6

Meeting Date	Start time	Finish time	Meeting duration	No. of reports
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Strategic Planning & Environment OSC	06/09/23	19:30	21:10	01:40	6
	04/10/23	19:30	21:10	01:40	4
	01/11/23	19:30	20:40	01:10	5
	10/01/24	19:30	22:40	03:10	3
	06/03/24	19:30	21:52	02:22	8
	11/06/24	19:30	20:10	00:40	3
	15/07/24	19:30	21:45	02:15	7

SPAE OSC average duration of meeting = 01:51

SPAE OSC average number of reports per meeting = 5

Mark Brookes
Monitoring Officer
The Forum
Marlowes
Hemel Hempstead
HP1 1DN

31 January 2024

Dear Mark,

Scrutiny Improvement Review – CfGS consultancy support

I am writing to thank you for inviting the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to carry out an evaluation of Dacorum Borough Council's scrutiny function. This letter provides feedback on our review findings and offers suggestions on how the Council could develop its scrutiny process.

As part of this feedback stage, we would like to facilitate a series of workshops with Members and Officers to reflect on this review and to discuss options for improvement.

1. Introduction

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny were invited by Dacorum Borough Council to conduct a Scrutiny Improvement Review and this work took place between October and December 2023.

The Council had not undertaken a comprehensive review of its scrutiny arrangements for some time. With a recent change in administration and several newly elected Councillors, this review provides an ideal opportunity for the Council to reflect on existing practice and to identify where improvements might be beneficial.

We want to acknowledge at the outset an appreciation of the positives that emerged through our work. These include:

- Officer support is recognised and valued.
- Members are engaged in the formal meetings / good level of questioning skills.
- There is a willingness to embrace change and think about how to do things differently.
- Both Officers and Members have a desire to learn from best practice elsewhere.
- There is a firm commitment from Members to link scrutiny work to issues that are of relevance to local people.

In terms of political support, member engagement, and council senior leadership support, there are strong building blocks upon which scrutiny could successfully develop. However, there is a sense that the function lacks impact, and therefore it is not as valued as it could and should be. In addition, there is recognition that work programming across all scrutiny committees needs to be focussed and aligned to the council's priorities with flexibility to consider emerging areas of concerns, especially those arising from residents.

2. Methodology

The review explored the following:

- **Structure.** What might the most appropriate structure be in terms of improving outcome delivery and taking account of resource pressures?
- **Culture.** What is the mindset and mentality underpinning the operation of the overview and scrutiny process?
- **Working practices.** How is information is prepared, shared, accessed, and used?
- **Impact.** How to ensure that scrutiny is effective and that it makes a tangible difference to the lives of people in Dacorum through improving outcomes.

CfGS's scrutiny improvement reviews (SIRs) follow a standard methodology, which involves some flexibility to incorporate whatever bespoke elements authorities need to take account of local circumstances. The standard methodology can be found at www.cfgs.org.uk/sir .

Full details of the evidence gathering;

- The survey was sent to 85 individuals (51 Elected Members and 34 Officers)
- 39 people (13 Elected Members and 23 Officers) completed the survey which was a 25% of Members and 68% of the Officers that it was circulated to;
- carried out 17 conversations; 11 Elected Members (including Leader, Deputy Leader and a number of Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Chairs and their Deputies) and 6 officers (including Chief Executive, Monitoring officer and S151 officer)
- reviewed agendas, minutes and reports of overview and scrutiny committee meetings:
- observed recorded meetings;
- explored work programming and topic prioritisation;

The review was conducted by:

- Cath Buckley – Senior Governance Consultant, CfGS
- Annette Aitkin – Researcher, CfGS

Quality assurance was provided by Ian Parry, Head of Consultancy, CfGS

3. Findings

3.1 Structure

This section examines the current structure and what might the most appropriate structure be in terms of improving outcome delivery and taking account of resource pressures.

There are currently three overview and scrutiny committees in Dacorum which follow a thematic approach. These committees support the work of the Cabinet and Council as a whole and are overseen by the Democratic Services team who support these committees alongside a range of other regulatory committees and responsibilities.

Finance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- The purpose of this committee is to perform the overview, scrutiny and policy development role in relation to all matters and business associated with the Cabinet Portfolio for Finance and Resources.
- There are 14 Members on the committee (including the chair and the vice-chair).
- Between January 2023 and September 2023 this committee held 5 meetings (January 2023's meeting was cancelled).

Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- The purpose of the committee is to perform the overview, scrutiny and policy development role in relation to all matters and business associated with the Cabinet Portfolios for and Housing and Property Services, excluding general fund property which is covered by the Finance and Resources committee.
- There are 14 Members on the committee (including the chair and vice-chair).
- Between January 2023 and September 2023 this committee held 6 meetings.

Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- The purpose of the committee is to perform the overview, scrutiny and policy development role in relation to all matters and business associated with the Cabinet Portfolios for Place and Neighbourhood Operations.
- There are 14 Members on the committee (including the chair and vice-chair).
- Between January 2023 and September 2023 this committee held 6 meetings.

Non Statutory Health and Well-Being Scrutiny Committee

In addition to the above committees, the Council also operates a non statutory Health Scrutiny Committee. Whilst the review did not explore this committee in great depth, it was clear that it has potential to add value, however there is some work to do to ensure that its functions link into the wider health and social care environment and do not seek to duplicate activity elsewhere.

Audit Committee

There were mixed levels of understanding in relation to the Council's Audit Committee. Some of those interviewed viewed this committee as part of the Overview and Scrutiny function, rather than as a regulatory board. There is clearly some work to do to ensure that all Elected Members have regard for these two distinct roles. In practice we would look to see Audit consider whether the policies and procedures were working, and scrutiny consider whether the policies and procedures that the Council has chosen to implement are the right ones and having the desired outcomes. Both functions could use management information to form the basis of these deliberations and might share their findings with each other. Good practice could see a discussion over how best to consider an issue – whether it is a scrutiny or an Audit concern with a default position of sharing work programmes. Working together enables agreement on the issues that can be passed between committees, avoiding duplication, and could also consider engaging Members of the Audit Committee on scrutiny task groups or in budget scrutiny. CfGS have produced guidance for Councils on this matter which can be accessed [by clicking this link](#).

Research from previous reviews conducted by CfGS has found that committee structures can be a sticking point in relation to the quality of scrutiny's work and impact. There is often a belief that if structures are altered then the effectiveness of scrutiny will increase, but this is often not the case. Our research highlights that there is no 'ideal' scrutiny structure or optimum number of committees. There is no connection between the size and number of committees and their effectiveness, but there is a clear connection between having a clarity of purpose and a function that adds value and realises impact.

The overall thematic approach to structure in Dacorum is akin to that of many other borough councils of similar size and demographic. However, the frequency of meetings is higher than in most other councils, whilst this did not provide a concern to those spoken to, we did hear that Members are keen to conduct more in-depth scrutiny outside of the formal meeting space. As such, there may be opportunities to reduce the number of formal meetings that take place to provide the space for more in-depth scrutiny (review panels), however it is understood in Dacorum that this may also entail reviewing the frequency of other Council committees.

Additionally, whilst the three main overview and scrutiny committees follow a thematic approach, this structure does cause a degree of confusion amongst some Officers in relation to where each item should be taken. This could be due to a recent staffing restructure which has posed some issues with alignment between the work of committees and the Councils directorate areas. Dacorum's Constitution clearly sets out the remits however, there requires some further communication to aid wider understanding of where specific issues should be scrutinised.

3.2 Culture

This section explores the relationship between scrutiny Members and Cabinet, the interface between Members and Officers and whether relationships are effective. It also explores the mindset and mentality underpinning the operation of the overview and scrutiny process.

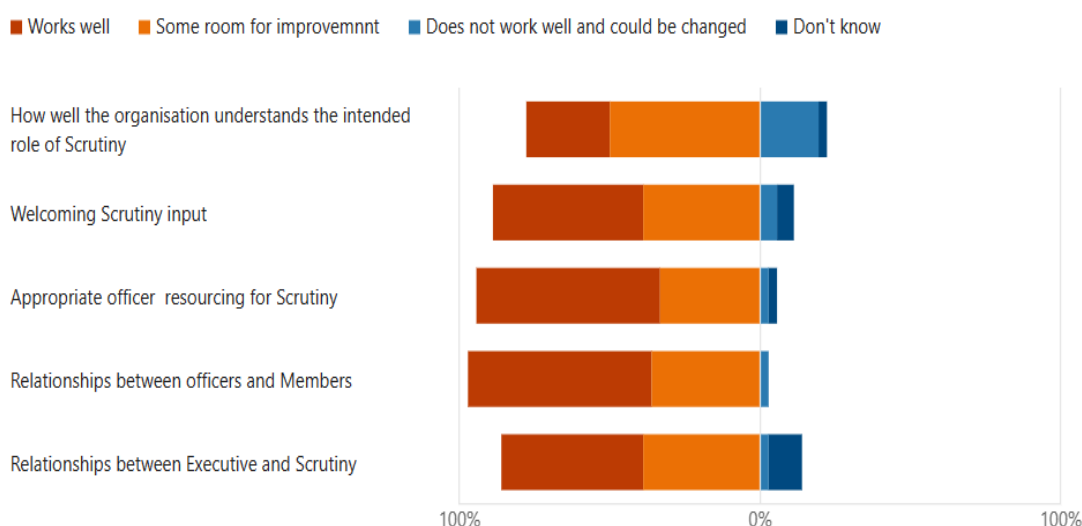
The chart below demonstrates the aggregated responses in the survey to questions about culture. This shows that there is some room for improvement in terms of how well the organisation understands the intended role of scrutiny. Conversely half of respondents thought that Scrutiny input was welcomed at the council, with 39% of respondents expressing that there was some room for improvement in this area.

Overall, it appears that officer resourcing for scrutiny is appropriate, however 33% did feel that there was room for improvement. It is important to note that there is no dedicated scrutiny officer post in Dacorum and the function is currently supported by democratic services officers who also manage a range of other committees and responsibilities.

Respondents thought that the relationships between Officers and Members worked well (61% of respondents). Relationships between Members and the Executive are more mixed, with a near equal split between those who thought that this worked well (47%) and those who thought that there was some room for improvement (39%). This indicates that there could be some specific issues rather than a more widespread concern. In terms of responses from Officers and Members there was no significant difference between the viewpoints held in relation to culture.

8. Culture- Thinking about your recent experience, how well do you think these elements work:

[More Details](#)



Findings from the survey, desktop research and conversations showed that the scrutiny function has the conditions to improve and succeed, during the conversations there was a realisation from both Members and Officers that scrutiny performance could be more effective and productive and there was a willingness and commitment to make changes to allow this to happen.

There is recognition that since the change of political control, there are several newly elected Councillors who lack experience and knowledge of ways of working. And whilst this can be of concern to some, it can also be a positive in terms of bringing new ideas and fresh perspectives. We heard a definite will to embrace change and explore new ways of working and look at best practice from elsewhere, a range of such examples can be drawn from the CfGS publication, [The Good Scrutiny Guide](#). There is a good level of buy in amongst Councillors and it will be important to harness this and support the newer Councillors to increase their knowledge of the council, its services and ways of working so that they are able to navigate governance systems and fully understand their role within it. Whilst training has been provided in relation to the role of scrutiny, audit committee and specific training for leading and chairing scrutiny, these have not always been well attended.

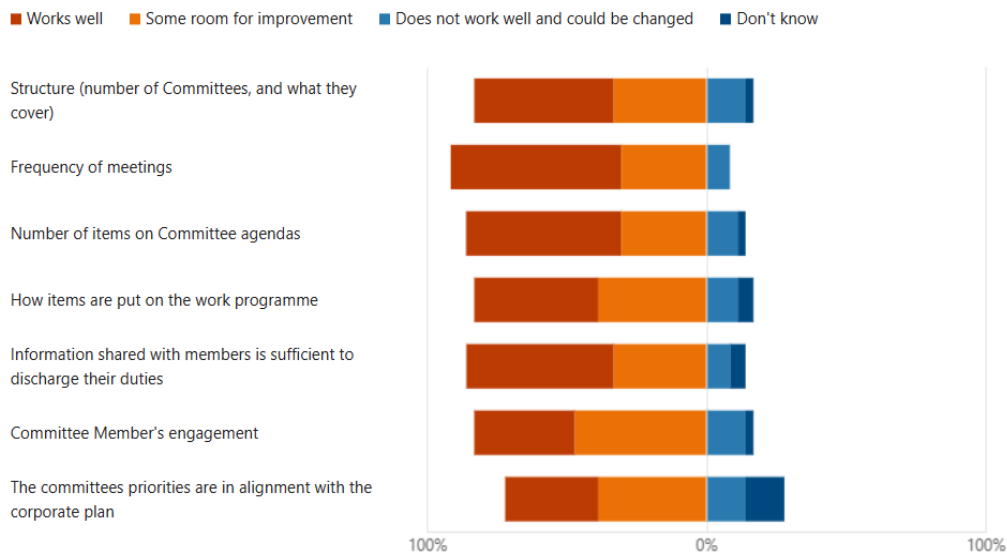
Member-officer relationships are overall positive. Both the survey and interview evidence highlighted strong working arrangements and a sense of mutual respect. There is faith in the senior leadership team and Members express the view that they are fortunate in having excellent dedicated Officers to support them. However, in a more strategic sense, there are mismatches in perception and expectation on how scrutiny is carried out. The frequency of meetings produces support problems for Officers preparing reports for those meetings and it is not always clear to Officers why reports are being requested, and communication of Members' objectives in bringing items to committee does not always happen.

Scrutiny's success is dependent on the right Members, with the right capabilities and attributes, leading and managing the scrutiny function. Scrutiny Chairs have a vital task in leading the committees, setting the culture and working together to uphold high standards of behaviour and good cross-party working. There is an opportunity for the Chairs to work together to share learning between one another with the option to also engage with the Chair of the Audit Committee on a regular basis (as highlighted in 3.1) and also for the Chairs to explore how they can develop further into their roles as committee leaders.

3.3 Working practices

This section discusses the practices in place that support the scrutiny function and relates to how items are selected and how information is prepared, shared, accessed and used.

Working practices- Thinking about your recent experience, how well do you think these elements work:



Responses to the survey indicated that people generally feel that working practices are effective. However, there is room for improvements to be made in relation to committee member engagement (53% of officers stating there is some room for improvement and 17% stating that it does not work well, and 38% of Elected Members stating that there is some room for improvement and 8% stating it works well). In relation to the alignment of priorities of scrutiny to those within the Corporate Plan there is also room for improvement (43% of officers stating some room for improvement and 13% stating that it does not work well or that they don't know, and 31% of Elected Members state this area requires some improvement, with 16% stating it does not work well and 15% stating that they do not know).

Feedback from the conversations undertaken indicated that there are a number of Elected Members who are unhappy with the information supplied within agenda packs, and whilst the survey highlighted people are largely satisfied that the information is sufficient for Members to discharge their duties, our 121 conversations indicated that sometimes this information is too detailed. We would concur that too much detail in scrutiny can become counter-productive and detract from scrutiny's ability to be strategic. It will be important for the committees (led by their Chairs) to be clear about content sought in report and presentations and to be able to feed this to those drafting the documents so that they are always linked to the objectives sought from the area under consideration and contain the level of detail that the committee feel is appropriate for them to fulfil their duties.

Analysis of previous minutes showed that Members are engaged in the formal meetings, make valid contributions, and pose a range of detailed questions to witnesses. There is a tendency for committees to operate as though they are holding Officers to account, rather than the Cabinet Members. At times, the detail focused on is operational rather than strategic and whilst some scrutiny Members do make effort to be strategic and focus on the areas of importance, this sometimes falls short. Scrutiny can very often become an information exchange or become too operational to add value to the bigger strategic issues. This can be addressed through better topic selection that is more closely aligned to the Council's strategic priorities.

We found that without some refocusing Scrutiny could drift towards a performance management role and the practice of receiving quarterly performance reports is not something that all Members or Officers see as the purpose of scrutiny or where it can offer useful value. We would concur, as often by the time such data reaches committee, it is likely already to be out of date. Whilst it is important that scrutiny assesses performance information, there also needs to be useful commentary provided as to where and how scrutiny's oversight can be utilised. Quarterly reports might be used as a source of insight to support topic selection rather than an opportunity to conduct line by line data analysis, that rarely leads to valuable recommendations being made. This shift in approach would assist the committees in adding value to council policy and strategy through greater emphasis on the big challenges and opportunities ahead. We would suggest that, instead of taking performance information to committee as a default position, Elected Members receive it informally, perhaps as part of a wider information digest which they can use to drive and inform their regular work.

Refining the approach to work programming would achieve better results from scrutiny's work. There are comprehensive tools that other local authorities apply to improve work programming and raise the productivity and impact of scrutiny. Some Councils invite practical suggestions from members of the public and other stakeholders in dedicated planning sessions, or via an online consultation. This is a way to get a sense of what others feel is important for Councillors to be reviewing, and used alongside a meaningful overview of management information to inform deliberations can provide a long list of potential topics where scrutiny can add value. This process is aligned with best practice in section 6 of the [Statutory Scrutiny Guidance](#). Once the long-list is created each scrutiny committee can determine the topics that they wish to scrutinise using a prioritisation tool that highlights which items have the potential to add most value, the use of such a tool justifies how and why a decision has been taken to include certain issues and not others. This will also support greater member-ownership of the scrutiny agenda and provide an opportunity to build in the voice of the public into the work of Dacorum's scrutiny committees.

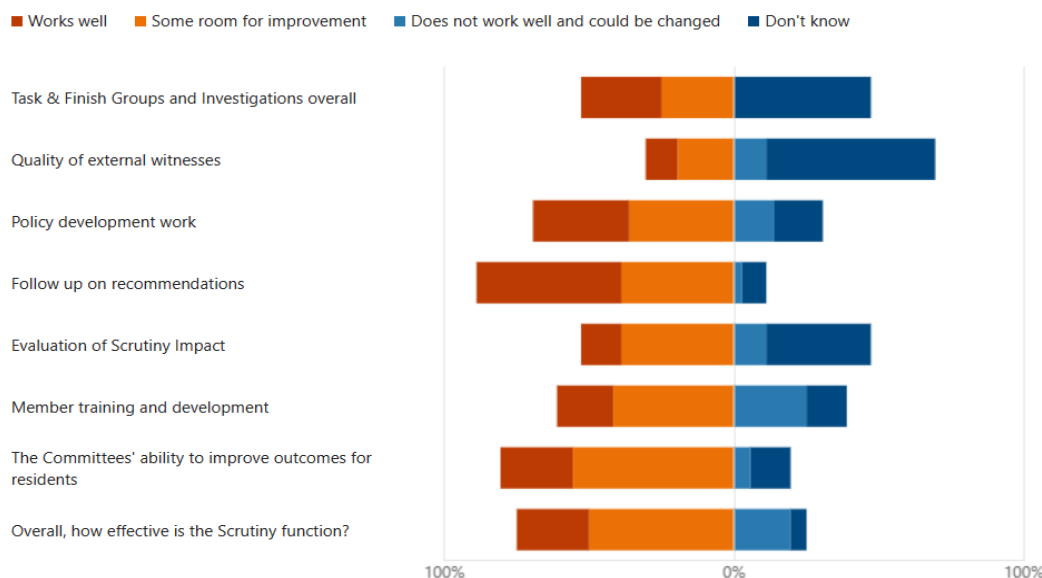
3.4 Having an impact

This section explores ways to demonstrate that scrutiny is effective and that it makes a tangible difference to the lives of people in Dacorum, through helping to shape policy, decision-making and improve outcomes.

Currently there is limited evidence of impact arising from scrutiny’s work. The graph below shows that there are a substantial number of ‘don’t know’ responses when people were considering impact. This is a far higher proportion than the other categories, suggesting that scrutiny itself is not aware of how, or even if, it can evidence having had impact.

Impact monitoring is an area that many Councils struggle with, however it is a relatively simple process to look at recommendations that scrutiny have made and whether they have been accepted and implemented. Longer term, consideration could be given to speaking to people inside and outside the council about the work that scrutiny has carried out to gather some tangible examples of scrutiny’s impact. Being able to articulate how scrutiny adds value to the work of the Council helps to further build on the work of the function and helps others to see its potential for improving services for local people.

Impact- Thinking about your recent experience, how well do you think these elements work:



Our research concluded that further work could be done to encourage public participation and to build a wider range of perspectives into scrutiny’s work. Insights gained from the survey found a lack of expert witnesses being invited to scrutiny committee meetings. Similarly, public participation is minimal and our conversations with Members also showed that there is

interest in exploring how scrutiny can amplify the voice of the public and better engage with residents and the community.

It is considered best practice to involve local people in the work of scrutiny as a way to help connect the council to the community it serves. Scrutiny could explore and experiment with ways to allow greater access, openness, and involvement with the public. This might include scrutiny a reasonable and well justified use of site visits in the community, inviting the public to offer ideas for work plans, and greater use of social media channels for resident input and communicating the progress and impact of scrutiny work. We heard that this had happened in the past, but less so recently.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Structure

Recommendation 1

Consider how the scrutiny committee structure could be reprofiled to allow for more in-depth scrutiny work. We recommend that the current structure of three committees is maintained, but are clearly articulated and that the frequency of formal meetings is reviewed to provide the space for more Member led, strategic scrutiny to take place. (Whilst noting that this could require review of all Council committees).

Recommendation 2

Developing regular communication between Scrutiny Chairs. This could be achieved through default position of sharing work programmes and insight on working practices. This should also engage the Chair of Audit and Cabinet Members to highlight future issues and the part which Scrutiny could play in testing and shaping these forward plans.

4.2 Culture

Recommendation 3

Develop an awareness raising programme for Members and Officers. This should be in addition to the current package of learning and development support for Elected Members and Officers across the Council. Wider awareness raising should be explored to build, refresh and enhance organisational knowledge and understanding of the role, purpose, and powers of scrutiny. This should be built into induction training for new Elected Members and include Officer support for drafting and presenting reports to committee.

Recommendation 4

That consideration is given to providing a short term investment to the scrutiny function. This will help to ensure that the actions and recommendations arising from this report can be implemented and that ‘added value’ scrutiny can take place.

4.3 Working practices

Recommendation 5

Review the process for developing work plans for each Scrutiny committee. Engaging Members, Officers, partners, and the public to inform work programming and to prioritise the topics for review in a proportionate way. This should include planned space for the detailed scrutiny of forthcoming decisions alongside the capacity to conduct in-depth scrutiny outside of the formal meetings.

Recommendation 6

Create a regular information digest for all Elected Members. This would provide the opportunity for Members to be cited on performance data and other high-profile work which is for information rather than taking up space on the formal agenda. This digest should also be used to identify those issues which may require further in-depth investigation.

Recommendation 7

Review the content and detail for scrutiny reports and briefings. This would ensure consistency of communication and reporting formats as well as help focus on purpose of an item for consideration by scrutiny and expectations of the level of detailed contained within agenda packs. This could be done alongside Elected Members and officers so that all parties were clear on expectations and content.

4.4 Having an impact

Recommendation 8

Reviewing how the recommendations are made and how impact is measured. This could include a process for any recommendations made being captured and reported back to Scrutiny to show how Cabinet have reflected on comments made and to orientate towards outcomes-focused meetings. This recommendation will be important following the review of work programming and the space having been provided for in-depth scrutiny work.

5. Thank you and acknowledgements

Thank you to all the Officers and Members who took part in this review, your openness and willingness to share your views have helped to shape the recommendations made. It is hoped that this work enables you to build on existing good practice and help to ensure that all Officers and Members are invested in making scrutiny a success in Dacorum Borough Council.

Scrutiny topic selection

(On a scale of 1-10 where 10 strongly agrees with the consideration).

CONSIDERATIONS	Suggestion 1:	Suggestion 2:	Suggestion 3:	Suggestion 4:	Suggestion 5:	Suggestion 6:	Suggestion 7:	Suggestion 8:	Suggestion 9:	Suggestion 10:
Is it a key public issue and community concern?										
Is it strategic & significant?										
Is it related to the Council's corporate priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan?										
Is it a matter which the Council's complaints data suggests is a significant issue?										
Will it deliver results for local people?										
Of concern to partners and stakeholders? Reference results from public consultation										
Does it relate to a failing service or dissatisfaction with a council service?										
Are there sufficient resources to effectively scrutinise the topic?										
Does not duplicate work of other committees?										
Will the recommendations lead to effective outcomes?										
Can the council implement or influence the outcomes?										
TOTALS										

The scoring is a guide to help you remember which proposals scored highly against the considerations for topic selection.

The highest 'score' does not necessarily mean that a topic will be selected but it may help inform your final selection.

Proposed Council, Cabinet OSC cycle - Meeting Timetable 2025-2026

	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	
MON					1			1						MON
TUES			1		2			2 Cabinet						TUES
WEDS			2		3	1		3 Audit				1		WEDS
THURS	1 HCC Elections		3 DMC		4 Member Development	2 Standards		4	1 Bank Holiday			2		THURS
FRI	2		4	1	5	3		5	2			3 BANK HOLIDAY	1	FRI
SAT	3		5	2	6	4	1	6	3			4	2	SAT
SUN	4	1	6	3	7	5	2	7	4	1	1	5	3	SUN
MON	5 BANK HOLIDAY	2	7	4	8	6	3	8	5	2	2	6 BANK HOLIDAY	4 BANK HOLIDAY	MON
TUES	6	3 SPAE OSC	8 Cabinet	5	9 SPAE OSC	7 Cabinet	4 SPAE OSC	9	6 Licensing Cabinet Contingency	3 Cabinet	3 SPAE OSC	7 Cabinet Contingency	5 Licensing	TUES
WEDS	7	4 F&R OSC	9	6	10 F&R OSC	8	5 F&R OSC	10 Joint Budget	7	4	4 F&R OSC	8	6	WEDS
THURS	8	5 H&C OSC	10 Member Development	7	11 H&C OSC	9 Member Development	6 H&C OSC	11 DMC	8 DMC	5 DMC	5 H&C OSC	9	7	THURS
FRI	9	6	11	8	12	10	7	12	9	6	6	10	8	FRI
SAT	10	7	12	9	13	11	8	13	10	7	7	11	9	SAT
SUN	11	8	13	10	14	12	9	14	11	8	8	12	10	SUN
MON	12	9	14	11	15	13	10	15	12	9	9	13	11	MON
TUES	13	10 Licensing	15	12	16	14	11	16	13 SPAE OSC	10 Licensing	10 Licensing	14 Licensing	12	TUES
WEDS	14 Annual Council	11	16 Audit	13	17 Audit	15 MDSG	12	17 Council	14 F&R OSC	11 MDSG	11	15 MDSG	13 Annual Council	WEDS
THURS	15	12 DMC	17	14	18 DMC	16 DMC	13 DMC	18	15 H&C OSC	12	12 DMC	16 DMC	14	THURS
FRI	16	13	18	15	19	17	14	19	16	13	13	17	15	FRI
SAT	17	14	19	16	20	18	15	20	17	14	14	18	16	SAT
SUN	18	15	20	17	21	19	16	21	18	15	15	19	17	SUN
MON	19	16	21	18	22	20	17	22	19	16	16	20	18	MON
TUES	20 Licensing	17 Cabinet Contingency	22 Licensing	19	23 Cabinet Contingency	21	18 Cabinet Contingency	23	20 Member Development	17	17 Member Development	21	19	TUES
WEDS	21	18 Health & Wellbeing	23 Council	20	24 Health & Wellbeing	22 Council	19 Member Development	24	21 Audit	18 Council	18 Audit	22 Council	20	WEDS
THURS	22 DMC	19 Standards	24	21 DMC	25 Call-in contingency	23	20 Call-in contingency	25 Bank Holiday	22 Call-in contingency	19	19 Call-in contingency	23	21 DMC	THURS
FRI	23	20	25	22	26	24	21	26 Bank Holiday	23	20	20	24	22	FRI
SAT	24	21	26	23	27	25	22	27	24	21	21	25	23	SAT
SUN	24	22	27	24	28	26	23	28	25	22	22	26	24	SUN
MON	26 BANK HOLIDAY	23	28	25 BANK HOLIDAY	29	27	24	29	26	23	23	27	25 BANK HOLIDAY	MON
TUES	27	24	29	26	30 Licensing	28	25 Licensing	30	27	24	24 Cabinet	28	26	TUES
WEDS	28	25 MDSG	30	27		29	26	31	28 Health	25	25	29 Health	27	WEDS
THURS	29	26 Member Development	31 DMC	28		30	27		29 Standards	26 Member Development	26 Standards	30 Member Development	28	THURS
FRI	30	27		29		31	28		30	27	27		29	FRI
SAT	31	28		30			29		31	28	28		30	SAT
SUN		29		31			30				29		31	SUN
MON		30									30			MON
TUES											31			TUES

School holiday dates are shaded
Council
Cabinet
Overview & Scrutiny meetings

H&C OSC = Housing & Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee
 SPAE OSC = Strategic Planning & Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee
 F&R OSC = Finance & Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee

DMC = Development Management Committee
 MDSG = Member Development Steering Group

Agenda Item 9



HOUSING & COMMUNITY Overview and Scrutiny Committee

www.dacorum.gov.uk

Report for:	Housing & Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Title of report:	Building Safety Update
Date:	15 January 2025
Report on behalf of:	Councillor Simy Dhyani, Portfolio Holder for Housing
Part:	I
If Part II, reason:	N/A
Appendices:	None
Background papers:	Building Safety Policy
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	BSA – Building Safety Act PAP – Principle Accountable Person SLT – Senior Leadership Team HRB – High-Risk Building BSR – Building Safety Regulator FED – Flat Entry Door BRSMB – Building and Resident Safety Management Board FRA – Fire Risk Assessment

Report Author / Responsible Officer

Mark Pinnell, Assistant Director, Property (Interim)



Mark.Pinnell@dacorum.gov.uk / 01442 228731 (ext. 2731)

Corporate Priorities	A clean, safe and enjoyable environment Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery
Wards affected	All Borough wards
Purpose of the report:	To provide an update on our response to satisfy requirements introduced by the Building Safety Act 2022
Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):	None arising from this report
Period for post policy/project review:	Annual update or more regularly if required

1 Background

To comply with the statutory requirements introduced by the Building Safety Act (BSA) 2022, Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) has made changes to its organisational structure. These changes ensure clear accountability, alignment of resources, and robust governance for building safety compliance.

The Act formalised the roles of Principal Accountable Persons (PAPs) and Accountable Persons (APs), which carry specific legal liabilities for building safety. While DBC already had individuals in similar positions, the formalisation of these roles has strengthened accountability and clarified responsibilities across all levels of the organisation.

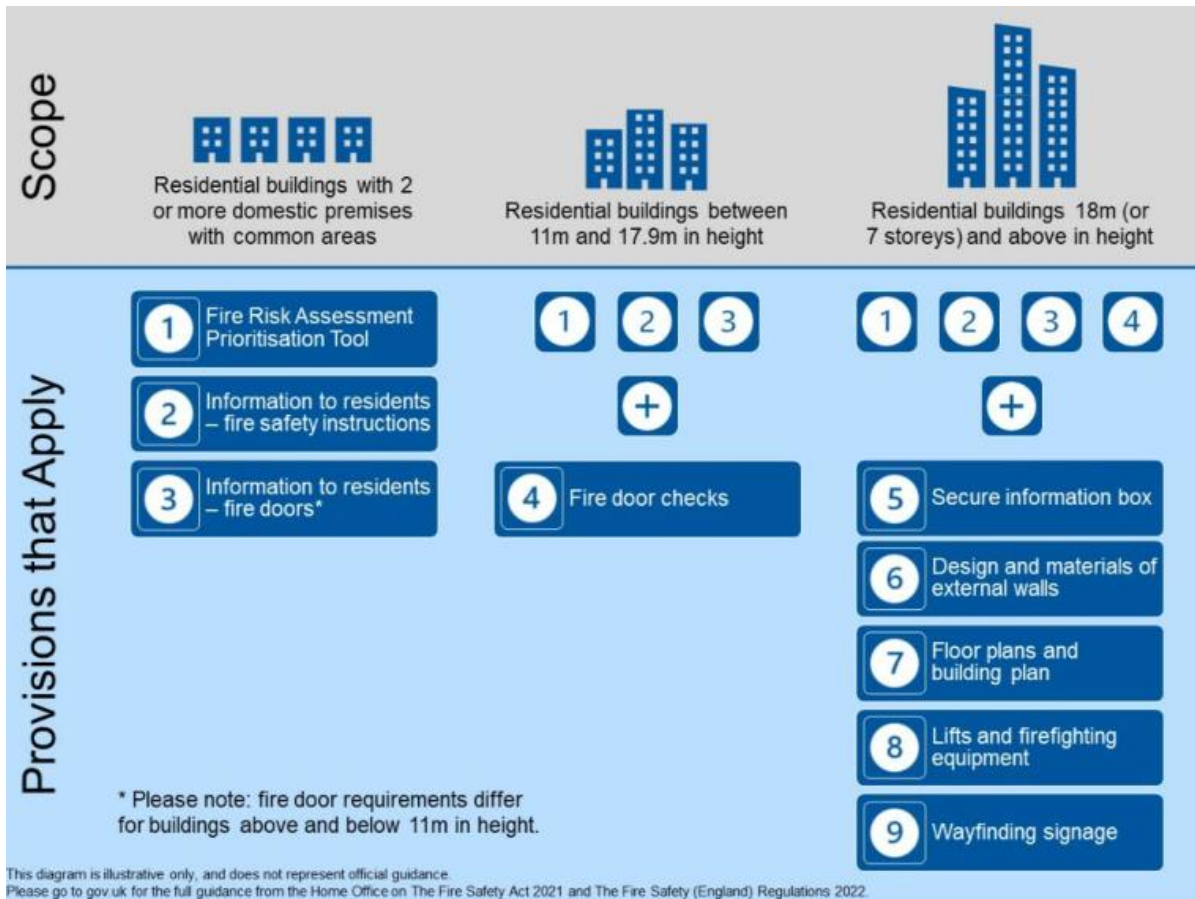
Key changes include:

- **Strategic Oversight:** The Council Leader has been designated as the PAP, with operational responsibilities delegated to the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) to ensure alignment with statutory requirements.
- **Operational Leadership:** The Head of Safe Homes leads compliance efforts, oversees policy implementation, and ensures effective reporting to senior management.
- **Day-to-Day Management:** The Safe Homes Team Manager, Safe Homes Surveyor and Compliance Officers are responsible for operational tasks, including inspections, data management, and maintaining the golden thread of information.

These changes have enhanced DBC's capacity to manage building safety effectively, ensuring legal responsibilities are met and operational processes are streamlined. Further details on roles and responsibilities are outlined in Section 7 – Roles & Responsibilities of the Building Safety Policy.

2 Building Safety Act Requirements

As a social housing landlord responsible for High-Risk Buildings (HRB's) the BSA introduced new requirements for DBC in 2022. The key parts of the legislation can be followed through the diagram below, produced by the National Fire Chiefs and Council:



The key changes to how DBC manage HRB's are as follows:

1. **Property Registration** - All buildings over 18m in height and containing at least two residential units must be registered with the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) before October 2023
2. **Building Safety Cases** - When called in, DBC must supply the BSR with a Building Safety Case Report within 28 days of notification to achieve a Building Assessment Certificate. The Building Safety Case must be supported by additional information, such as a resident engagement strategy and fire strategy
3. **Door Inspections** - For buildings over 11m DBC must carry out annual checks of flat entrance doors and quarterly checks of communal fire doors. These checks must be completed by a competent person
4. **Gateway 2** - When undertaking significant or material works at a HRB, DBC must notify the BSR and request approval through the Gateway 2 process. Gateway 2 is a stop/go point and building control approval must be obtained from the Building Safety Regulator before relevant building work starts

3 DBC's Response to the Building Safety Act

Property Registration

Ahead of the October 2023 submission deadline, DBC undertook a comprehensive review to identify blocks of flats that met the 18m threshold. This involved physical site visits to confirm building heights. The review identified five buildings exceeding 18m in height, all of which were registered with the BSR before the deadline. This proactive approach ensured full compliance with statutory requirements.

Building Safety Cases

DBC has prioritised the development of comprehensive Building Safety Cases for all HRBs. Key actions include:

- **Document Organisation:** Dedicated folders were created for each in-scope building to store safety case reports, resident engagement strategies, and mandatory occurrence reporting information.
- **Resident Engagement:** Engagement events were held in October and November 2023 to inform residents about building safety initiatives and gather their input. Bespoke engagement strategies were distributed to all residents in HRBs.
- **Enhancing Engagement:** Resident feedback has been instrumental in shaping safety practices. For example, residents raised concerns about fire door access policies, leading to a review and improved communication around inspection schedules.
- **Ongoing Involvement:** Plans are underway to further improve resident involvement through regular updates, feedback mechanisms, and targeted communication strategies tailored to different resident demographics. Although the statutory requirements have been met, we see opportunities to enhance building safety-specific resident engagement strategies.

To achieve this, we are currently working with TPAS, an industry leader in resident engagement, to develop building-specific resident engagement strategy toolkits. These toolkits aim to empower residents, encourage open dialogue, and ensure that safety measures are understood, supported, and actively embraced by the communities they are designed to protect. This approach goes beyond compliance, focusing on creating partnerships with residents to promote trust, transparency, and a shared commitment to building safety.

As part of this process, we will be hosting four discovery sessions in December 2024, gathering valuable insights to shape the toolkits which are planned to be finalised and ready for implementation by February 2025.

- **Consultant Support:** In 2024, DBC appointed the Oakleaf Group as a dedicated HRB fire safety consultant. Their role includes:
 - Conducting a gap analysis to identify compliance gaps.
 - Commissioning additional surveys and inspections, including new fire strategies, Type 4 Fire Risk Assessments, and PAS9980 external wall assessments.
 - Ensuring that building safety cases remain fit for purpose and align with evolving regulatory requirements.

Door Inspections

DBC inspects fire doors in 15 buildings: five over 18m and ten over 11m. To support this, the Propeller software system was introduced for real-time tracking and reporting, thus streamlining compliance. A Safe Homes Team member was trained as a surveyor to ensure inspections are conducted by a competent professional.

Currently, DBC has achieved a 94% success rate for flat entry door (FED) inspections and 100% for communal doors, reflecting the effectiveness of the system and processes in place. A dedicated operative has been instrumental in assisting with access, helping to overcome challenges such as resident resistance and logistical barriers. Improved communication, flexible scheduling, and route optimisation further support these efforts.

Gateway 2

We understand our responsibility to engage the BSR through Gateway 2 when undertaking work to our buildings over 18m. We currently work with specialist consultants who can satisfy the Building Safety Principal Designer role and will submit applications when required.

4 Building and Resident Safety Management Board

The Building and Resident Safety Management Board (BRSMB) was established in 2022 and has representation from across the council as well as external partners such as Herts Fire and Rescue Service. The board is chaired by the Assistant Director of Property and meets every two months, although the frequency can be increased when required.

The board has Terms of Reference and focuses on current pressures whilst undertaking horizon scanning to ensure future requirements are managed accordingly. Some key areas of activity are:

- Review key initiatives, such as the Building Safety Implementation Plan
- Evaluate ongoing compliance performance and address areas of concern
- Scrutinise and challenge performance to ensure DBC fulfils its statutory obligations
- Provide informed recommendations in the council's best interest

At every meeting a Composite Report is presented that captures key activity in the preceding period. This is a collaborative report that mainly focuses on our social housing stock and Private Rented Sector responsibilities and is designed to provide the board with reassurance that we are meeting our statutory duties.

5 Internal Governance

To ensure compliance with the statutory responsibilities introduced by the BSA, DBC has significantly strengthened its governance framework through the introduction of the BRSMB. This approach focuses on creating robust oversight mechanisms, enhancing transparency, and leveraging technology to support data-driven decision-making. This board subsequently reports into the Corporate Health and Safety board for enhanced oversight.

Senior Leadership Oversight

Complementing the BRSMB, the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) receives a monthly Assurance Report, offering additional scrutiny of compliance performance. This report, which has evolved from the former Compliance Report, now includes expanded areas such as:

- Damp and mould management.
- EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) performance.
- Stock condition surveys.
- Traditional statutory compliance areas, including fire safety, gas safety, and electrical testing.

The Assurance Report enables the SLT to:

- Make informed decisions to prioritise building safety.
- Monitor progress across multiple compliance areas with consolidated data.

Data-Driven Compliance Management

DBC has invested in advanced technology systems to enhance data accuracy, reduce manual intervention, and ensure real-time tracking of compliance activities. These systems provide transparent and concise reports that are accessible to all officers and senior managers. Key systems include:

Software Solution	Functionality
MRI Servicing	The servicing module tracks the performance of statutory compliance areas. This includes gas safety and electrical testing for domestic dwellings and blocks of flats. The migration of data for active fire equipment and lifting equipment has commenced and should be in place in 2025
Geometra	A system procured to accurately monitor and manage Fire Risk Assessments (FRA's). All Housing owned blocks of flats are risk assessed periodically, and this system allows us to manage the FRA programme as well as the resulting actions
Propeller	A specialist system that our door inspection regime is managed through. All doors in buildings over 11m have been tagged and are inspected in line with the BSA requirements. Propeller can evidence and demonstrate how this requirement is being met
Risk Flag	This system has been designed to produce real-time building safety cases. The uploading of all relevant data and documents is ongoing and supplemented by the work the Oakleaf Group (our dedicated fire safety consultant) are completing at our HRB's

These integrated systems ensure that all compliance reports are supported by real-time data and detailed documentation, offering transparency and efficiency.

Integrated Governance and Technology

By combining governance enhancements with compliance driven software, DBC has created a streamlined, transparent, and accountable approach to building safety management. The BRSMB, working alongside the SLT, ensures that compliance activities are carefully monitored and continuously improved. This framework positions DBC to effectively manage the increased legal and operational responsibilities introduced by the BSA, while providing reassurance to residents, stakeholders, and regulatory bodies.

6 Financial

Investments and Future Planning

The introduction of the BSA has required DBC to make significant investments in staffing, systems, and processes to ensure compliance. These include:

- Staffing: Creation of new roles, including the Safe Homes Manager, Safe Homes Support Officer, and Safe Homes Surveyor, to manage compliance activities and inspections effectively.
- Technology: Adoption of the following systems:
 - Propeller: For tracking and reporting fire door inspections.
 - Risk Flag: For real-time Building Safety Cases.
 - MRI Asset Management: For tracking compliance data across gas, electrical, and fire safety.
- Surveys and Assessments: Commissioning Type 4 Fire Risk Assessments, PAS9980 External Wall Assessments, and updated fire strategies.

The focus on the golden thread of data has been critical, ensuring all building safety information is accurate and accessible. Moving forward, evolving requirements may necessitate:

- Expanding compliance processes to include all buildings over 11m.
- Scaling up staffing, systems, and surveys to accommodate additional properties.
- Enhancing resident engagement strategies through toolkits currently under development with TPAS.

We have laid the foundation for these changes but anticipated considerable resources will be needed if the height threshold for a HRB, currently set at 18m, is reduced.

7 Next Steps

As part of our ongoing commitment to building safety, our key initiatives and areas of focus for the coming year include the Planned Works Programme for HRBs, development of a Communications Planner alongside enhanced CX Feedback utilisation, the ‘Who’s Behind the Door 2.0’ initiative, completion of Person-Centred Fire Risk Assessments (PCFRAs), improvements to Safety Management Systems, and the recruitment of an additional Safe Homes Surveyor.

Initiative	Timeline	Priority
Recruitment of Safe Homes Surveyor	Q1 2025	High
Completion of PCFRA	Q2 2025	High
Implementation of Safety Management Systems	Q3 2025	Medium
Pelham Court Fire Safety Upgrades	Q2 2025	High
Fennycroft Road & Kylna Court Door replacement	Q2 2025	High

Planned Works Programme for High-Risk Buildings (HRBs)

- **Gade Tower:** All required fire safety and compliance work have been completed.
- **Fennycroft Road:** Substantial refurbishment has been undertaken, including fire doors and compartmentation upgrades throughout. Additional work to address minor issues is planned for the coming year.
- **Pelham Court:** Substantial fire safety upgrade works are scheduled for the new financial year for both blocks. These include:
 - Fire stopping and compartmentation upgrades.
 - Installation of enhanced ventilation within the stairwells.
 - Fire Doors throughout both blocks, both Flat Entry Doors and Communal doors.
- **Kylna Court:** A new building, but not without issues. Decking upgrade works were completed in the summer of 2024. In 2025, all internal flat entry doors will need replacement to meet fire safety requirements.

Communications Planner and CX Feedback

- Comprehensive Communications Planner:
 - DBC is collaborating with Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Aaron Services to create a communications planner capturing all seasonal events and providing timely updates on fire safety and compliance matters.
 - Communications will reflect a multi-agency approach, ensuring clarity and consistency.
- CX Feedback System:

- Recently implemented, this system allows DBC to target communications to specific groups, locations, or blocks.
- It measures engagement levels, enabling tailored and dynamic communication strategies.
- The system is key to improving resident engagement and ensuring that communications are impactful and relevant to each community's unique needs.

Who's Behind the Door 2.0

- This initiative aims to gather accurate data on who is living in DBC's blocks, addressing gaps in resident information.
- A legal requirement exists to conduct PCFRAs for residents with additional needs. However, the lack of comprehensive resident data currently hinders this process.
- Initial steps have been taken in collaboration with the SQA Team, but a cross-departmental approach will be required moving forward to:
 - Ensure resident data is accurate and up to date.
 - Support compliance with PCFRA requirements.
 - Inform strategic decisions and compliance efforts based on a true understanding of DBC's resident population.

Safety Management Systems

- The BSR emphasised the importance of including Safety Management Systems in building safety cases.
- Currently, while individual procedures exist, there is no centralised or dedicated system in place.
- A cross-departmental effort is required to:
 - Consolidate all existing procedures into a single coherent system.
 - Conduct a gap analysis to identify and address deficiencies.
 - Ensure statutory requirements for safety management and mandatory occurrence procedures are met.

Recruitment of a Safe Homes Surveyor

To support the growing demands of building safety compliance, DBC plans to recruit an additional Safe Homes Surveyor. This role will:

- Enhance inspection capacity.
- Support ongoing compliance efforts.
- Ensure that all statutory requirements are met efficiently and effectively.

These initiatives are critical to ensuring DBC continues to meet and exceed its statutory obligations while fostering trust and transparency with residents. By addressing these key areas, we aim to enhance building safety, improve resident engagement, and deliver a comprehensive and sustainable compliance strategy.



Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report for:	Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Title of report:	Responsive Repairs Update
Date:	15 January 2025
Report on behalf of:	Councillor Cllr Simy Dhyani, Portfolio Holder for Housing & Property Services
Part:	I
If Part II, reason:	N/A
Appendices:	N/A
Background papers:	N/A
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	WIP – Work In Progress

Report Author / Responsible Officer

Dan Thurlow – Head of Asset Management

Corporate Priorities	<p>Service improvement and delivery: Running the Council efficiently and putting residents at the heart of everything we do</p> <p>Homes to be proud of: Enable well-maintained and affordable homes, where people want to live</p> <p>Proud and thriving borough: Realise our potential as a great place to live and work with a thriving business community</p>
Wards affected	All wards affected

Purpose of the report:	To provide an update on the improvements made to date and assurance of continual improvement to service provision whilst tendering the new R&M Contract
Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):	For the Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note the contents of this report
Period for post policy/project review:	N/A

1. Background

- 1.1 The Responsive Repairs service plays a pivotal role in the overall satisfaction of residents, representing one of the most frequently utilised services by tenants. It directly impacts the daily lives of residents, ensuring their homes are safe, functional, and well-maintained.
- 1.2 There are several statutory responsibilities, that need to be met by Dacorum Borough Council as a landlord. Regulation and legislation in repairs are evolving and we will soon see Awaab’s Law introduced and a new decent homes standard. This will likely see more focus on risk, transparency, quality and condition. We also need to manage the financial risk associated with potential high cost repairs and the risks to reputation of getting this service wrong.
- 1.3 Recognising its importance, recent improvements have been implemented to enhance both service efficiency and resident satisfaction. These enhancements are designed not only to meet the increasing demand for repairs but also to minimise operational risks, optimise resources, and reduce costs for the council. Effective management of the service, with a focus on responsiveness and quality, is instrumental in maintaining high levels of resident satisfaction while mitigating financial and operational risk. This report outlines the key improvements made to the service, highlighting their positive effects on both residents and the council.
- 1.4 Due to an IT system issue, some resident survey data is not available for October and November.

2. Work in Progress

- 2.1 Work in Progress (WIP) plays a critical role in improving both resident satisfaction and operational efficiency within the Responsive Repairs Service. We have undertaken a targeted reduction programme reducing the WIP from 2883 in April 2024 to 1676 in November 2024, which represents a 42% reduction or 1207 jobs.
- 2.2 By reducing the number of open repair orders the service can ensure that each responsive repair request is handled with the necessary attention and focus, leading to quicker resolutions and higher-quality outcomes for residents. With the same amount of resource managing fewer open repair orders, we can undertake new work quicker with improved supervisory oversight.
- 2.3 To reduce the WIP we have undertaken the following activities:
- Cardo hold weekly meetings with sub-contractors. This covers off performance and completion of works.
 - Sub-contractor performance is reviewed on a monthly basis, and poor performing contractors are removed.
 - Specialist trades are mainly delivered by Cardo’s sub-contractors, such as roofing and drainage. Cardo have reviewed the capacity of these sub-contractors and where needed have increased the number of sub-contractors to meet the demands of the workstream.

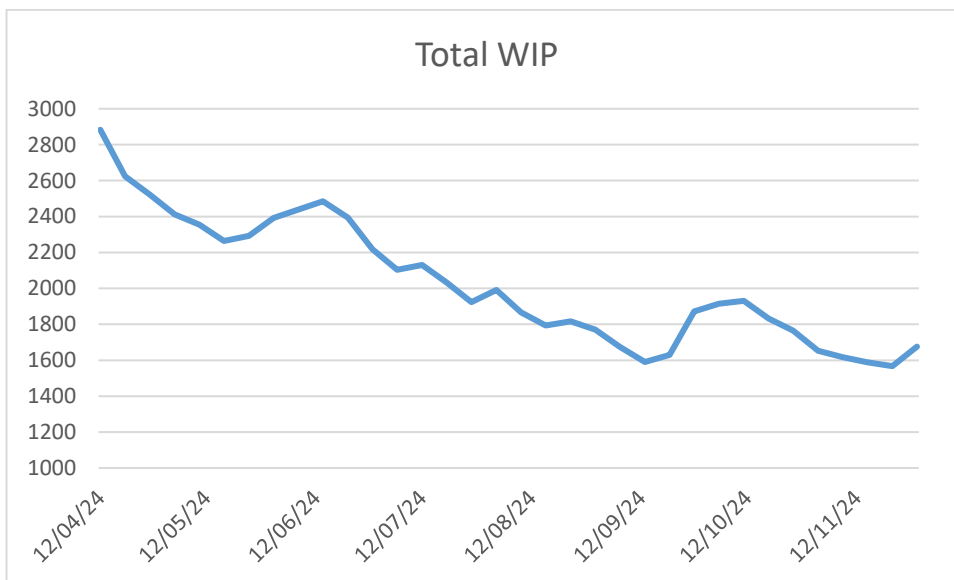
- Cardo’s senior management hold a weekly review. In this meeting they monitor how much work has an appointment in the next two weeks, and address issue blocking more work being booked in. This has increased capacity from around 500 jobs to around 900 a week. Any orders that might miss the deadline for completion are also discussed and plans made to address risk.

2.4 One of the key benefits of reducing the number of open orders is the ability to concentrate resources on individual cases when problems arise. With fewer ongoing tasks staff can dedicate more time to addressing specific issues, ensuring that residents receive timely and tailored solutions that align to their expectations. This increased focus reduces the risk of unresolved or overlooked repairs, fostering greater trust and satisfaction among residents.

2.5 Additionally, a more streamlined WIP means there is a reduced need for residents to chase or follow up on outstanding works. This reduction in administrative workload frees up valuable time for the call centre, allowing them to shift focus towards proactive initiatives such as regular communication with residents when there are problematic repairs, and identifying potential issues before they escalate into larger problems. Proactive work not only prevents service disruptions but also contributes to a more positive experience for residents, who feel that their concerns are being anticipated and addressed before they become urgent.

2.6 Fig 1 shows the consistent WIP reduction since April. The increases on September and November reflect the impact of adverse weather. As we continue to reduce the WIP, we will see the impact of such events smooth out and reduce back to normal faster. As we are still in the improvement phase, we see an inverse correlation with resident satisfaction with each severe weather event. One of the tests that we have successfully completed this improvement programme will be when we don’t see that correlation.

Fig 1 - WIP Reduction Graph



2.7 Unfortunately, all good news comes at a cost. The success of the WIP reduction programme has led to additional revenue pressures as each completed job needs to be paid for. This has contributed to budget pressures resulting in the need to manage all spending proactively to avoid overspending. We may need to defer some more expensive works to the beginning of the next financial year, to ensure we remain on budget.

2.8 In summary an efficient WIP management system enables a more responsive, proactive, and resident-focused approach, improving both satisfaction levels and the operational effectiveness of the responsive repairs service. By reducing the strain of excessive open orders, the service can focus on resolving issues quickly and efficiently, benefiting both residents and the council alike.

3. First Time Fix

3.1 Achieving a first-time fix is a key driver of customer satisfaction in responsive repairs. We have measured the correlation between first time fix and customer satisfaction since April 2024 using a piece of software called CX Feedback which has demonstrated that when a repair is completed on the first visit customer satisfaction reaches 91%. In contrast, when a repair requires multiple visits satisfaction has fallen as low as 38%. This significant disparity underscores the value customers place on a swift and efficient resolution to their issues. The convenience of not having to reschedule appointments or deal with ongoing disruptions plays a major role in improving the customer experience, fostering trust, and enhancing the reputation of Dacorum Borough Council as a landlord.

3.2 To improve first time fix we have undertaken the following additional activities:

- Cardo’s Planning Team are allocated specific time for follow-on work.
- Cardo have moved the planning team into specialist roles. This provides an expertise in each trade, allowing work the correct materials and operative to be identified, thus reducing errors.
- Where possible we are standardising materials and holding these in van stock and in the warehouse. This has had some benefit, but mainly it will increase first time fix over the next few years.
- Van stock has been reviewed to make sure we hold the items most likely to be used in repairs.

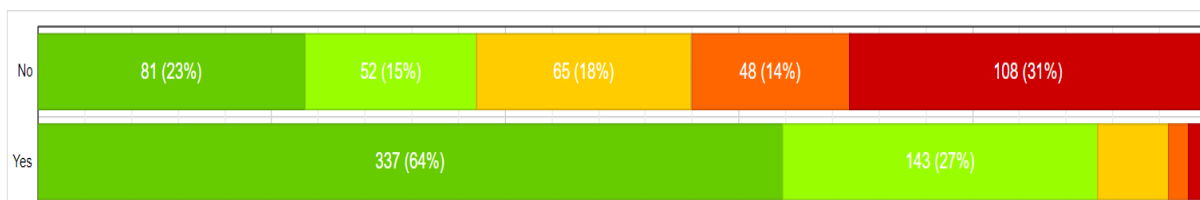
3.3 Fig 2 provides a snapshot of customer satisfaction levels aligned with first time fix statistics.

Key

- Dark Green – Very Satisfied
- Light Green – Satisfied
- Light Orange – Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied
- Dark Orange – Dissatisfied
- Red – Very Dissatisfied

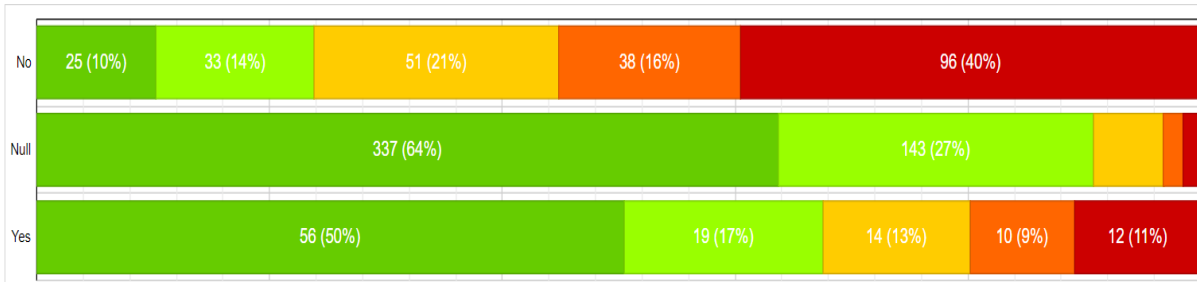
Yes = There has been a first time fix
 No = There has not been a first time fix

Fig 2



3.4 From a satisfaction perspective we know we can recover the customer satisfaction to some extent by offering an immediate follow up appointment. Fig 3 shows the impact on satisfaction when we are able to offer a follow on appointment immediately. (Null denotes there was a first time fix, Yes – there was a follow up appointment made straight away, No – the follow up appointment was not made straight away)

Fig 3 – Resident satisfaction when a follow on appointment is made



3.5 Operatives are now able to book a follow on visit with the tenant whilst they are still in the resident’s home, however a follow on repair can only be booked with the permission of a supervisor. The supervisor will go over the reason a follow on is needed and where possible unblock the issue so there can be a first time fix.

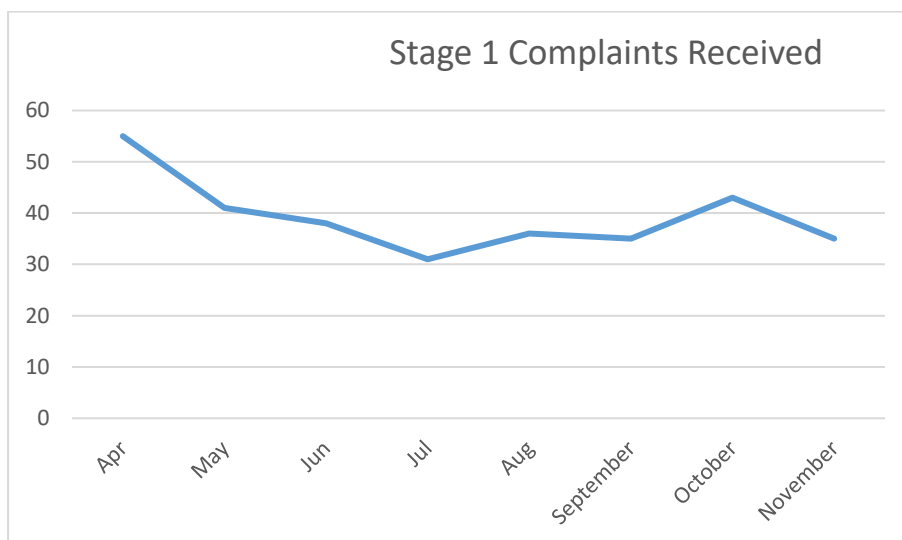
3.6 In summary, focusing on first-time fix rates offers substantial benefits including higher customer satisfaction, improved operational efficiency, and greater cost savings. By ensuring repairs are completed in one visit, both Cardo and Dacorum Borough Council stand to gain from a more streamlined, cost-effective, and successful partnership.

4. Complaints

4.1 Effective complaint management is a cornerstone of any responsive repairs service. With approximately 27,000 responsive repairs completed annually, within the constraints of a limited budget, it is inevitable that we will receive a significant number of complaints. However, rather than viewing complaints as a negative outcome, we embrace them as valuable opportunities for improvement. Our culture welcomes feedback, ensuring that every complaint is seen as a chance to better understand customer concerns, enhance service delivery, and build stronger relationships with those we serve.

4.2 Fig 5 demonstrates the number of Stage 1 complaints received each month.

Fig 5



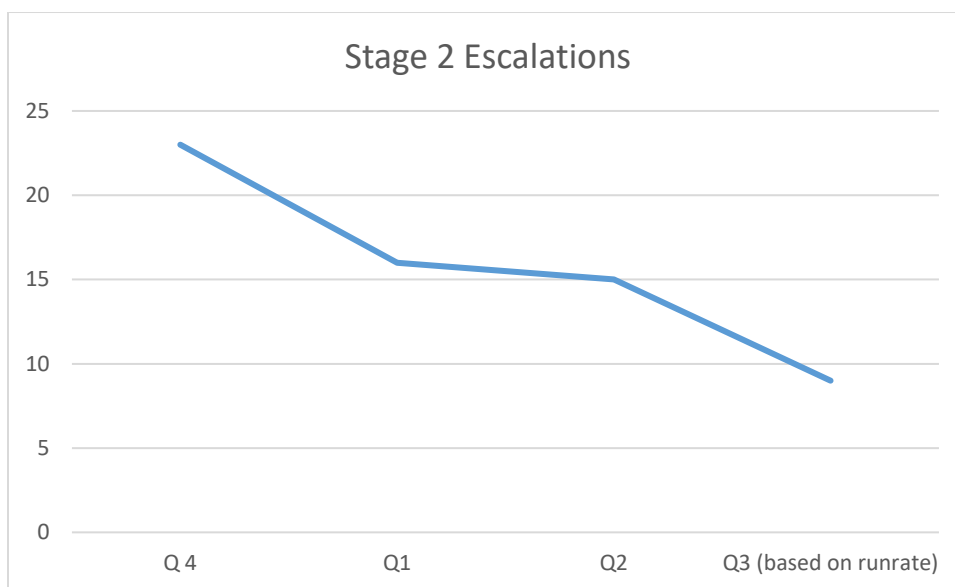
4.3 The management of stage 1 complaints focuses on delivering the basics of complaint handling. We call the resident when a complaint is received to make sure we understand the issue and what resolution the

customer wants. The issue is then investigated and before we write back, we will call the resident again to confirm the outcome and what will be in the response letter. This gives us an opportunity to address any additional points the customer raises and avoid an unnecessary escalation to stage 2. Where appropriate we will visit the resident during the investigation so we can make sure the problem has been correctly diagnosed and the correct specification issued to contractors.

4.4 Our approach to complaint management focuses on transparency, accountability, and proactive resolution. By maintaining a customer-centric philosophy, we aim to address concerns promptly and thoroughly, preventing escalation and fostering trust. One of the key indicators of success in this area is the reduction in the number of complaints that escalate to Stage 2. We have seen a positive trend in this metric, signalling that our efforts to resolve issues at the earliest opportunity are proving effective.

4.5 **Fig 6** – Stage 2 escalations showing number of stage 2 complaints each quarter

Fig 6



4.6 A crucial part of this success is our commitment to track each promise made to customers and ensure follow-through. We carefully track all commitments and ensure that each is fulfilled as agreed. This rigorous follow-up process helps us identify and resolve potential issues before they grow into larger problems, preventing the need for escalation.

4.7 These commitments are reviewed weekly by each individual team and at a senior level at least once a month to make sure focus is maintained.

4.8 We have undertaken the following additional actions to assist in complaint handling

- Flexibility has been booked into the scheduling system to make sure complaints and high priority jobs are not cancelled should an operative call in sick.
- Weekly meetings are held to review commitments made in complaint response to make sure nothing is missed
- Cardo have dedicated operatives who are allocated tasks related to complaints. These operatives are multi-skilled and have demonstrated the highest standards of customer care, so we can be sure the issue is dealt with the first time.
- We review what customers tell us works well, so we can replicate this across other work. Particularly in the feedback to operatives on how to approach resident communication.

4.9 The benefits of an efficient complaint management system are far-reaching. By reducing the number of Stage 2 escalations, we not only improve customer satisfaction but also reduce the strain on resources, freeing them to focus on more complex issues and further improvements. In addition, managing complaints effectively helps identify recurring issues or systemic challenges, offering us valuable insights into areas where operational improvements can be made. This continuous feedback loop supports service innovation and the refinement of processes, ultimately leading to higher quality repairs at a lower cost.

4.10 Moreover, a well-managed complaint process enhances our reputation. When customers see that their concerns are being taken seriously and that we act swiftly to resolve them, their trust in our service increases.

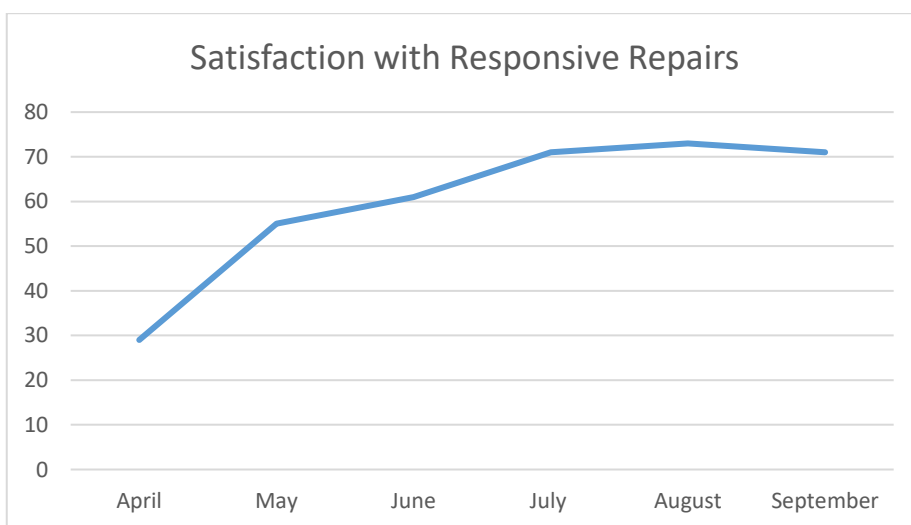
4.11 In summary, complaint management is a critical element of our responsive repairs service. Given the volume of work and the inevitable nature of customer complaints, our proactive, transparent, and accountable approach ensures that issues are resolved quickly and effectively, minimising escalations and improving overall service quality. By embedding a culture that welcomes complaints and follows through on commitments, we strengthen both our operational efficiency and customer relationships, ultimately driving continuous improvement across our service delivery.

5. Resident satisfaction

5.1 We have seen a consistent increase in resident satisfaction since April 2024. Unfortunately, an IT issue has meant we have not received the electronic notifications from Cardo, which would be our trigger to send the satisfaction survey. We only received a handful of responses in October and November. These placed satisfaction at 46% & 47% respectively. We are confident the small sample size is not reflective of the overall service.

5.2 The deluge of rain towards the end of September had a negative impact on satisfaction. We were not yet in a position to quickly respond to the influx of additional work. We received approximately 900 additional repair orders in this time. As the WIP reduction programme continues and we deliver other service improvements our ability to respond to significant adverse weather events will continue to improve.

5.3 **Fig 7** resident satisfaction from transactional survey



5.4 We have made considerable progress in improving resident satisfaction. This is achieved by focusing on the drivers listed above. We have also undertaken the following activities:

- A new KPI for the planning team has been introduced based on the oldest job rather than the number of jobs they are booking, so they are not incentivised to book in the easiest work only. This reduces the number of overdue jobs.
- Where access for asbestos tests is a problem the call centre are making courtesy calls to try to unblock this, which speeds up the overall repair time.
- A materials tracker has been introduced; the call centre will update residents if orders for materials are delayed.
- 'We've not forgot you call' being made for any out of target jobs, by the call centre every two weeks.
- Learning from complaints is applied, so other residents benefit
- We hold a weekly service improvement meeting, which focuses on a different workstream each week. This generates some immediate ideas for improvement and other things we add to an action plan.
- Capital workstreams are allocated early, allowing Cardo to mobilise and communicate plans with residents. Capacity is allowed within this programme for unexpected responsive works that we find out about during the year.
- A new induction programme for all labour working on our contract has been introduced. This has more focus on customer service standards.
- A dedicated Resident Liaison Officer has been allocated to Cardo's damp and mould workstream
- We have reduced the number of open damp and mould cases from 573 in April 2024 to 263 as at December

6 Damp & Mould

- 6.1 Damp and mould continues to be a demanding workstream. We have amended the way we triage works, which now focuses as much on any vulnerabilities as we do on the property issue. This helps us to identify if there are any people living in the property who might be more vulnerable to mould in the home.
- 6.2 Previously all damp and mould cases were passed to a Dacorum Borough Council surveyor to decide on the works needed. We have now authorised Cardo to issue immediate works following the triage. For example, they will ask questions to identify if there are any leaks or ventilation repairs needed. They will also raise orders for mould washes immediately, rather than waiting for a survey. This creates some space for the surveyor to investigate the cause of the issue, without compromising safety or delaying works.
- 6.3 We have also introduced initiatives to find damp and mould that has not been reported by residents. Each servicing visit completed by Aaron Servicing now includes a damp and mould inspection, they will report back to us if they see, smell or the resident reports damp or mould. We also inspect for this during the stock condition survey, so every home is receiving at least one pro-active damp and mould inspection a year.
- 6.4 Where we have capital programmes, we consider how we can address damp and mould issues whilst we are undertaking works such as increasing loft insulation whilst replacing roofs, ensuring optimum levels of ventilation are incorporated into the design of the windows we replace etc. We also look to prioritise properties that have known mould issues when considering the decarbonisation programmes such as the recent Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund wave 2, albeit these works are also subject to strict grant funding criteria.
- 6.5 Cardo have a dedicated damp and mould team, with a supervisor, resident liaison officer and specially trained operatives. We also have other contractors working on damp and mould cases, to make sure there is sufficient capacity to respond to the demand. Along with our dedicated surveyors the wider team have developed a detailed knowledge of the damp and mould issues in Dacorum Borough Council's properties. In most cases they know the underlying cause if the damp before they attend the property, based on similar cases they have seen. We are looking to document this knowledge and create a playbook to ensure we catalogue a history of the measure undertaken that have proven to be effective. Given we have a fixed

number of archetypes and a fixed number of issues, we can set the solution to each scenario and keep adding to this this each time we learn something new. This will gradually improve our first time fix rate.

6.6 To monitor the more complex cases and those we believe might reoccur, we can use an environmental sensor which detects the temperature, relative humidity and carbon dioxide levels. This helps us to identify where a solution may not have worked or provide crucial data for us to share with our residents to help them help themselves to reduce humidity, improve ventilation and ultimately reduce the impact of increased humidity levels in their homes.

6.7 We are aiming to be able to profile all the properties that have had mould and damp reported over the last 12 months, either from a resident report or from the pro-active inspections by April 2025. We will combine this with the archetype data we have and produce a comprehensive database of the property types and locations that have damp and mould issues.

6.8 We will use this data as a basis as we look to undertake works at scale to reduce the number of new damp and mould cases arising in the future.

7 Preparation for the new contract

7.1 We have reviewed what works well in the current contract as well as the areas we need to improve on. These lessons will be embedded into the new repairs and maintenance contract as far as possible. We have also considered how the repairs market has changed over the last ten years and where we believe issues will be in the future, leaving flexibility to adapt to new information.

7.2 We are designing the new contract to provide flexibility for Dacorum Borough Council, in partnership with residents, to influence how the key drivers of customer satisfaction are delivered. We have also carefully considered how to balance budgetary risk and deliver the required operational performance.

7.3 As we move into the final year of the current contract, we will be increasing our contract management to make sure we are controlling costs due to the risk that Cardo may look to profit maximise during this time. To balance this risk, we also focus on relationship management, practically with officers who are delivering the contract on a day to day basis, as the majority are likely to TUPE over to the new contract. The joint leadership course attended by Cardo and DBC's management team has proven to be very effective and we can see a different atmosphere in the office with far more collaboration and less blame. This boosted relationship will help us in the final stages of the contract.

8 Conclusion

8.1 The repair service is on a journey. We are delivering against a constrained budget, increasing demand for repairs, changing legislation. The improvements we are making will put us in a good position to meet the changes ahead. There is still considerable work to be done, the trajectory we are on is positive and continues to improve.