

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

13 SEPTEMBER 2016

Present:

Members:

Councillors: G Adshead
Anderson (Chairman)
E Collins
Fisher
Hicks
Howard
Riddick
C Wyatt-Lowe (Vice-Chairman)

Officers:	David Austin	Assistant Director - Neighbourhood Delivery
	James Doe	Assistant Director - Planning and Regeneration
	Katie Mogan	Member Support Officer
	David Skinner	Assistant Director - Finance & Resources
	Chris Troy	Group Manager - Regulatory Services

Also Attendance:

Councillor Janice Marshall
Councillor Graham Sutton

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

169 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14 June and 19 July 2016 were confirmed by the members present and signed by the Chairman.

170 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Ashbourn, Matthews and S Hearn.

Councillor Birnie substituted on behalf of Councillor Matthews.

171 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest

172 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

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

None.

174 **BUDGET MONITORING Q1 2016/17**

D Skinner introduced the report to the committee and said there had been a £613,000 overspend in Q1. In the same quarter last year, there was a larger overspend and the year finished with a surplus so is confident that the same will happen this year. The areas that are responsible for the overspend are: employees, waste services, supplies and services. The overspend in relation to employees is mainly centred on staffing issues in Building Control. Challenges in staff recruitment are being addressed to ensure the correct levels of staffing are in place.

A lot of work has been done regarding the capital programme with rephasing. Page 7 shows the projected rephasing for future years which includes: the play area refurbishment programme, waste and recycling improvements, fleet replacement programme, town centre access improvements and improvements to Gadebridge Park.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe referred to the historical position last year and she said was concerned with the significant reduction in budgets. Why are you confident that the council can manage possible overspends?

D Skinner said there is a continuous programme to examine budgets. There will be a decrease in budgets every year for the next four years. Some activities undertaken by the Council are one off pressures and the Council will look at the possibility of bringing forward some activities that are planned into the next year's budget.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said that many councils are experiencing huge financial pressures but Dacorum are not.

D Skinner said that the budgets are carefully scrutinised and examined by officers and members at the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Council is in a good position financially, has got a good track record of delivery and is confident they will achieve the savings required.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said she had huge admiration in the management and to keep up the good work.

Councillor Howard arrived at 7.40pm

Councillor Hicks questioned the loss in commercial waste – do they do more recycling than local authorities?

D Austin said that larger companies have a competitive advantage if they can offer larger schemes.

Councillor Anderson asked how much money would be lost from the budget if Dacorum lost all commercial waste collections.

D Austin said there would be a loss in income but also a loss in operational costs. Loss in net terms is not an issue. Local authorities deal with small companies which the larger commercial waste companies don't tend to deal with.

Councillor Birnie questioned the £75,000 slippage on line 148 and why the recycling for flats has been delayed?

D Austin said that providing recycling for flats is more complex and not one size fits all. A Task and Finish group has been set up to look in depth at this problem so that is why the project has been delayed.

Councillor Birnie asked if this £75,000 would be from efficiency savings.

D Austin said this was an indicative sum to provide extra bins.

Councillor Riddick asked about the roads being difficult to access and why are they not sufficient for service vehicles?

D Austin said the issue was with access and service vehicles not being able to pass through; new properties to service and missed bins. A specialist will be coming in to improve the service model which will hopefully allow for more streamlined waste service.

Councillor Riddick asked if this was exacerbated by staff shortages.

D Austin said that less sickness and less agency staff allows for a better service with less complaints and better productivity.

Councillor Riddick said that the staffing issue in building control is not going away and has been a problem for some time.

J Doe said this was an ongoing issue and there is an action plan to address the staffing issues. Building control is a service that must be provided. The main issue is the cost of professional staff; in house staff have been lost due as the pay is not competitive.

Councillor Riddick asked if there could be a compromise between agency and permanent staff.

J Doe said this was being looked at. The problem has only arisen this year. There has been a nil response to job advertisements and Dacorum does not offer market force supplements.

Councillor Riddick referred to line 152 in the report and asked how many vehicles there were, their life expectancy and their cost.

D Austin said the split back vehicles cost around £145,000-150,000 and they are budgeted for a five year working life. However, their life span is lengthened because Dacorum do not take them to landfill sites. The vehicles maintenance is monitored closely to ensure the cost is proportionate and not throwing good money after bad.

Councillor Riddick asked why there no transport manager.

D Austin said the staff member had to have a CPC and operator's licence. At the moment, G Pattinson currently holds these licences and has overall control of the vehicles repair shop. We are currently in discussions with other Local Authorities on the management of fleets to ensure they are more resilient. The interviews for transport manager are currently taking place.

Councillor Hicks said that with sickness so common in this area, can other staff members cover another round?

D Austin said staffing is constantly looked at. Staff have about 25 days annual leave and with the Council's average of 8 sick days a year, there are peaks and troughs in staffing levels. Staff are limited to how many people can be off at any one time.

Outcome

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

175 ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1

D Austin introduced the report and told members of some of the highlights in Q1. These included:

- A successful compost giveaway
- A successful ISO audit
- The release of Belted Galloway cows to Bunkers Park
- Charging for additional green bins
- Work of summer bedding – especially the Phoenix roundabout
- Significant improvements in sickness levels
- Corvu report is mostly green

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe asked if the risk register was showing all the risks or was an edited version.

D Austin said there are two risk registers; strategic and operational. The operational risk register is the Group Manager's responsibility and C Thorpe has revised this to include difficult weather and fuel shortages.

Councillor Marshall referred to page 2 of the risk register which referenced the Cupid Green Magazine. Councillor Marshall asked members if they would like to have this distributed to them.

The committee agreed that this would be a good idea.

Outcome

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

176 PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1

J Doe introduced the report and said that performance was strong with just one amber indicator on the performance report. Income from planning fees is down and it is likely that there will be a short fall at the end of the year. The department try and anticipate when big applications will be submitted but there has been less large applications being submitted than expected. However, small developments have increased.

Councillor Birnie asked about the planning fees on the risk register.

J Doe said that the Council had no control over the planning fees, they are set nationally. 2015/6 was a strong year with a £200,000 surplus and it was hoped this would continue. Over the five years from 2011, there was an average 8% increase in income and this year, a 5% increase has been planned and built into the planned income. This increase is unlikely to materialise as house builders have become cautious in the light of economic uncertainties.

Councillor Hicks asked about the assurance column on the risk register and if there was an easier way to provide information than just attaching links to huge documents.

J Doe said the column was there to provide evidence. The middle column shows what the service is doing to mitigate the risk.

Councillor Anderson said the committee had asked for information on the appeals allowed.

J Doe said the indicator has not appeared on the performance report and will look into it.

Councillor Fisher asked how many of the 167 new homes built were affordable.

J Doe said he would find out but would expect it to be quite high because there have been significant developments by Hightown and DBC. The planning policy states that 35% of units must be affordable if the development is over ten units.

Councillor Hicks mentioned developers building in chunks on gardens. They develop 4-5 houses at a time to avoid providing affordable housing.

J Doe advised that Government policy had recently changed to only seek affordable housing on ten units or more in urban areas. This policy had been challenged by two other Councils, but the Courts had upheld the Government's position. Cabinet has recently amended Dacorum Borough Council's policy to reflect this.

Outcome

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

177 REGULATORY SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1

C Troy introduced the report to members. He said there has been a slippage in Q1 for food hygiene inspections. There is a staff shortage and the current officers have been working overtime to get inspections up to date. Over the year, it is hoped that the department will be back on target. Legionella has been found in a water cooler in Maylands Business Centre. Legionella is an aerosol borne bacteria and it is hoped more work will be done on this in the future.

The department has carried out a 'Love you Community' day which aims to educate people and helps identify bad behaviour or practices. As a result, 5 tonnes of fly tipped waste was collected, 19 reports to Herts County Council for highways issues, 6 incidents of graffiti removed and there was a lot of engagement with residents.

In relation to corporate health and safety, further work has been carried out to control hand arm vibration.

Councillor Birnie referred to paragraph 2.1 of the report and asked why agency recruitment had not worked out.

C Troy said a number of agencies were contacted and they could not provide the calibre of staff needed. It was hoped that some staff would join the department from one agency but their personal circumstances changed and could no longer fill the role. Staff must pass a DBC assessment and have to be monitored by other members of staff for 2-3 weeks.

Councillor Birnie asked the officer if he was confident that inspections will be completed. He said there were some issues in his ward regarding vermin.

C Troy said that he expected food hygiene inspections in Q2 to be behind but hoped to see the work caught up by Q3. There aren't that many complaints about vermin so that is covered. If vermin are detected in a food premises kitchens, they are immediately closed down. Vermin in yards is more complicated because of multiple ownership and a lot of work is done around changing people's behaviours.

Referring to yards Councillor Birnie asked if officers revisit the premises even after the vermin problem has been resolved.

C Troy said the issues can't always be resolved. Education is a key factor, if this does not resolve the issue then enforcement action will be taken. Officers will try and revisit.

Councillor Riddick asked if there was a morale problem within the department with staff shortages and agency workers.

C Troy said he accepted this could be an issue particularly as officers have left and there are problems recruiting. The EHO's working for DBC are some of the lowest paid in Hertfordshire so it is difficult to attract staff. Officers have been working overtime to complete inspections and mentor agency workers. We have tried to recruit three times but unfortunately, there is no other option at the moment.

Councillor Riddick asked about the recent headline in the Gazette where two Chinese restaurants in Hemel Hempstead had been given a hygiene rating of 0.

C Troy said these premises were voluntarily closed. If there was a serious problem, officers can take immediate action. If they close voluntarily then the issues can be resolved quicker. 65% of food premises in Dacorum have a hygiene rating of 4 or 5. Sometimes, it can be frustrating as progress can be made with a premise and then management can change and progress lost.

Councillor Riddick referred to the HMO having to be brought back up to standard. Is the HMO recharged for the work?

C Troy said they were.

Councillor Fisher asked if HMO's were inspected regularly or only when complaints were made.

C Troy said there were about 600 HMO's in Dacorum but true estimates are probably much higher. Officers only come across them if a complaint had been made. At the moment, HMO's with 3 stories and 5 families are licensable.

Councillor Fisher asked if it was publicised that it is possible to complain to DBC about HMOs.

C Troy said the website gives information but it isn't actively showing how to complain. There is a lot of national coverage as it is a big issue for government. It is something to look into.

Councillor Anderson suggested half a page in the Dacorum Digest.

C Troy said there are government proposals to extend licensing to cover all HMOs. If this was to happen, the government would give local authorities extra resources to deal with it.

Councillor Anderson asked if inspections and hygiene ratings are now all one process.

C Troy said the Food Standards Agency brought the hygiene rating process into the food inspection process.

Councillor Anderson asked if the Council had been prosecuted for hand arm vibration.

C Troy said the investigation is still ongoing and awaiting the outcome.

Outcome

That the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

178 WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

Councillor Marshall requested an item on park by-laws for the October agenda.

Members agreed the work programme for 2016/17.

The Meeting ended at 8.40 pm