

CABINET REFERRALS

31st July 2018

7.1 CA/080/18 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Decision

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND:

That the Revised Medium Term Financial Strategy for the period 2018/19 – 2022/23 be approved

Corporate objectives

The Medium Term Financial Strategy supports the delivery of all five of the Corporate Objectives.

Monitoring Officer/S.151 Officer comments

No comments to add to the report

S.151 Officer:

The comments were included within the body of the report.

Advice

Councillor Elliott introduced the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as the next steps in the council's handling of its funds and preparation for the financial climate of the next few years. He drew attention to the savings already achieved, their contribution to keeping Council Tax at a manageable rate and hinted at possible measures still to come to enable the council to deal with reduced government funding and ensure the tax payer gets value for money. The Council has been prudent in its use of funds and he gave the example of how the Council has used the New Homes bonus effectively.

J Deane, Corporate Director (Finance & Operations) (JD) then took the meeting through some key points regarding successful savings and the need to maintain progress; the recent unqualified Audits; and General Fund assumptions based on current trends. He went on to identify possible risks and how our accounting and practices have been set up to address possible further reductions in central government funding. In financial terms our aim should be sustainable, self-sufficiency in four years.

Councillor Marshall clarified some figures regarding the negative Revenue Support Grant.

Councillor Birnie enquired when the Local Government Finance Settlement is likely to be formally announced and JD suggested that it looks probable it will be November 2018.

The Chair then moved the recommendation set out in the report.

Recommendation agreed.

Voting

None.

**7.2 CA/081/18 DACORUM SINGLE LOCAL PLAN 2020-2036: LOCAL
DEVELOPMENT SCHEME**

Decision

1 RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND:

- A. The adoption of the new Local Development Scheme (2018-2021) and;**
- B. That Council Authorise the Assistant Director - Planning, Development and Regeneration to make any necessary minor and non-consequential changes to the Local Development Scheme prior to its final publication.**

2. Resolved:

A Corporate Growth and Infrastructure Strategy for Dacorum be produced for consideration by Cabinet and Council at a future date.

Reason for decisions

To update members on the progress towards preparing Dacorum's Local Plan and seek approval for an updated Local Development Scheme (LDS).

Corporate objectives

The Council's Local Plan helps support all 5 corporate objectives:

- *Safe and clean environment*: e.g. contains policies relating to the design and layout of new development that promote security and safe access;
- *Community Capacity*: e.g. provide a framework for local communities to prepare area-specific guidance such as Neighbourhood Plans, Town / Village Plans etc.;
- *Affordable housing*: e.g. sets the Borough's overall housing target and the proportion of new homes that must be affordable;
- *Dacorum delivers*: e.g. provides a clear framework upon which planning decisions can be made; and
- *Regeneration*: e.g. sets the planning framework for key regeneration projects, such as Hemel Hempstead town centre and the Maylands Business Park.

Monitoring Officer/S.151 Officer comments

Monitoring Officer:

Preparation of a Local Development Scheme ('LDS') is a statutory requirement. The LDS is a project plan which sets out the timetable for preparation of Local Development Documents (LDDs) that form the Council's Local Planning Framework.

S.151 Officer:

The production and delivery of a single local plan and a local development scheme can be delivered within existing budgets provision.

Advice

Councillor Sutton introduced the item by outlining the issues involved in producing and maintaining the Local Plan and the Local Development Scheme.

The report seeks approval for the Local Development Scheme which sets out the Council's timetable for the production of its new Local Plan.

Members will be aware that the Council undertook the first major consultation on the new Plan in autumn 2017 on the 'issues and options' facing the Borough in terms of dealing with new growth and development to 2036.

Consultation was extensive and included a series of public exhibitions staffed by both Members and officers. The response rate was very high and generated over 23,000 separate comments on the future of the Borough from around 2,000 residents and organisations.

A summary of the key issues arising from the Consultation held last autumn is at appendix 2 of the report to the Cabinet.

As the report explains, there is much further technical work to be done before the Council will be in a position to prepare a full, draft Local Plan which will put forward the amount of development to be planned for in Dacorum, and where the Council considers it best to be located.

The draft LDS is set out at appendix 1 of the report to Cabinet. The timetable proposes ongoing preparation work for the next 12 months before a full draft plan is brought back to Cabinet and then Council for consideration. Regular update reports to Cabinet will be provided over this period.

From here, the intention will be to consult with the public in August/September 2019, leading to the formal submission of the draft Local Plan to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government in February 2020.

The plan would proceed to public examination of the plan by an appointed Planning Inspector in mid-2020, with adoption of the Plan by December 2020.

The plan considers all forms of development, and will set out a vision and strategy for how the Council considers the Borough should be developed to 2036.

To assist this process, the report proposes an additional piece of work – the creation of a new Growth and Infrastructure Strategy – to take a long term look at the future shape of the Borough.

Separate from the statutory local plan process, the new strategy will provide the opportunity for the Council to set out high-level objectives for what it wishes to see happen in terms of new homes, jobs and the economy, tourism, transport, parks and open spaces and the digital and technology agendas.

The largest issue will be accommodating new housing growth, and the challenge of doing this will be very high given the Borough's green belt constraints.

The report indicates that using the Government's new standard methodology for assessing local housing need, the starting point for housing growth is at 1,049 new homes per annum – a considerable jump from the target of 430 per annum in the Dacorum Core Strategy which was adopted in 2013.

We are expecting the Government to release new household projection figures in September of this year which are expected to show a fall as population projections released earlier this year by the Office for National Statistics have reduced.

The Government has also indicated that it may revise its standard housing methodology which it first put forward in draft form in September 2017.

Whereas there is no published timescale for the roll out of the revised methodology, it is possible that it won't be confirmed until early 2019 and as such we may not have full clarity on Dacorum's local housing need until then.

Between now and next Spring, Officers will be undertaking a thorough analysis of potential development sites and preparing options for how much new development there should be, and where, for the Council's consideration.

This is necessary to ensure that the process is sound and robustly based on evidence, and importantly in step with our confirmed local housing need level which we may not have until early 2019.

The Government is however clear that progress on Local Plans should progress and under the proposed timetable in front of Cabinet tonight, we are able to do this as clarity on our housing need level emerges over the next few months.

From the technical work that officers are doing now during that period, Members will be in a position next year to consider how to best allocate land for new development against the assessed figure of local housing need.

Cabinet will also note that there is a commitment between the Borough and District Councils in the south western part of Hertfordshire, along with the County Council, to prepare a joint strategic plan to address longer term growth pressures and the provision of strategic infrastructure.

Whereas a new joint plan will provide strategic direction for new development in south west Herts, each of the local planning authorities – Watford, Hertsmere, Three Rivers and St Albans in addition to Dacorum – will continue to prepare individual Local Plans which will confirm exact locations of new sites and the requirements they will make of developers.

This work is at an early stage, and officers will report on progress over the next few months.

Councillor Birnie then enquired about the status of the Grovehill Neighbourhood Plan (GNP): In planning terms how significant is it; and can it have a material effect on planning in the area. J Doe replied that the GNP is significant for individual planning applications and influences the strategic planning decisions for the area and its surrounds.

Councillor Birnie then went on to the composition of the SW Herts Authorities Group and its effectiveness as far as joint cross boundary development is concerned. He has the impression the our neighbouring authorities, particularly St Albans, are not being particularly co-operative and view Dacorum as the primary location for further housing development while opposing employment, business development on their boundaries. Councillor Williams was quick to point out that this is not the case and that all the surrounding authorities, including St Albans, are working in partnership and engaged in a sensible joint approach.

St Albans are in the process of releasing 75 hectares of land for employment use and are anxious to co-ordinate this with the authorities surrounding.

On a related matter, Councillor Tindall suggested that the Plan and any joint operations need to clarify that they relate to 'east of Hemel Hempstead' and not East Hemel Hempstead, which is solely the concern of the Borough Council.

Councillor Marshall then moved on to the timetable and the risk of Central Government delays in announcing its assessment Housing Needs delaying production of the Plan and leaving us vulnerable to pressure from developers. J Doe gave his assessment of the emerging picture; the flexibility of our approach and our ability to respond to and absorb changing criteria. He anticipates that central government decisions on planning and housing needs are due for publication in summer 2019.

The Cabinet returned to the 'duty to co-operate' features of the approach and Councillor Elliot asked who will arbitrate in cross-boundary matters. J Doe made clear that authorities have to be able to demonstrate evidence of robust discussions with their neighbours and produce a statement of common ground. This would be examined by the Planning Inspector in any Inquiry.

Councillor Birnie asked if the current plan is still fit for purpose and if we are at risk of a serious planning challenge due to the protracted length of time it takes to produce a new plan. J Doe reassured the members that we have to be able to evidence that the Council have made every effort to achieve and produce a new plan local plan and not be judged as dragging our feet. Councillor Williams agreed that our current local plan, though old in planning terms, is better than most and still relevant and effective.

Recommendations agreed.

Voting

None.

7.3 CA/082/18 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING

Decision

1. RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND;

That Council approve the Private Sector Enforcement Policy, as set out in the report to Cabinet and attached appendices.

2. Resolved:-

- a) That the proposed approach for the Private Sector Housing Strategy and the focus on regulating the Private Rented Sector and Houses in Multiple Occupation, as set out in the report to the Cabinet and attached appendices, be approved.
- b) That that a review of the Houses in Multiple Occupancy licence fee be reported at a future meeting.

Reason for Decision

To provide Cabinet with an overview of activity undertaken by the housing service since gaining the remit of Private Sector Housing including an overview of key legislative changes. To set out the proposed approach outlined in the policies and terms of reference.

Corporate objectives

The Strategic Housing Service's responsibilities and activity in relation to the Private Rented Sector contributes to the following corporate objectives:

- Clean Safe and enjoyable environment
- Building Strong and vibrant communities

Monitoring Officer/S.151 Officer comments

Monitoring Officer:

This is an important policy document to aid the decision making process in this area and will also help to keep the public aware of how the Council will decide Private Sector Housing enforcement matters.

S.151 Officer:

A review of the HMO licencing fees is underway as a result of the additional responsibilities being introduced in October 2018 and future approval from cabinet will be sought once these are known.

These fees need to be set to ensure they recover the full cost of delivering this service

Advice

Councillor Mrs Griffiths introduced the item drawing attention to the recent changes in legislation dealing with private sector housing and its impact on Housing and housing finance in Dacorum.

F Williamson, Assistant Director (Housing) (FW) took the Cabinet through the main elements of the report focussing on the potential growth of the number Houses in Multiple Occupation, in Dacorum, from around 44 up to 400 due to the revised definitions and rules in the new legislation. She also highlighted the changes proposed for setting and reviewing fees and charges and the ongoing work to estimate and set the new fees. FW stressed that we have to be seen to have adopted a fair and proportionate, mixed tenure approach.

Councillor Marshall expressed her support for the proposals and is anxious that we agree the fees and charges without delay, so if necessary or possible, bring the fee setting report to Cabinet at the earliest opportunity and avoid costs falling on the Council. FW agreed that the fees should be agreed at the earliest opportunity though there is still a significant amount of investigation required to assess the extent of the task and the resources that it will require.

Recommendations agreed.

Voting

None.

7.4 CA/084/18 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2019/20

Decision

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND;

That the Council do not revise or replace the current Council Tax Support scheme for 2019/20.

Reason for decision

To consider whether to revise or replace the existing Council Tax Support scheme for the 2019/20 billing year, and if so, to approve options for consultation. Also to note the requirement to consider revision or replacement of the Council Tax Support scheme for 2019/20.

Corporate objectives

Effective management of the Council's finances supports the Council's vision and all five of its corporate objectives.

Monitoring Officer/S.151 Officer comments

Monitoring Officer:

The Local Governance Finance Act 1992 (as amended) requires that a billing authority (this Council) considers each financial year whether to whether to revise or replace its Council Tax Support Scheme.

This report satisfies that requirement and recommends no revision or replacement to the current scheme be made.

If Cabinet or Council does require revision or replacement of the scheme following consideration of this report further consultation will be required.

S.151 Officer:

This is a S151 Officer report

Advice

Councillor Elliot introduced the item, advising the Cabinet that the current scheme is working well and we are prepared for the roll-out of Universal Credit, though the exact cost and resources it requires have not been finalised as yet. Chris Baker, Group Manager: (Revenues, Benefits & Fraud) (CB) then went on to explain how the current Council Tax Support Scheme is operating and the changes that Universal Credit may entail. Councillor Birnie asked if we are any closer to an estimate of the costs of Universal Credit and was told no new information is available since the report that was considered at the last Cabinet. He went on to ask if we could make comparisons with other authorities who had already undergone the changes. CB advised that is difficult as our experience will be different and it is too early to produce proper estimates without seeing the schemes in operation: we will have the evidence next year and can then budget effectively and implement the scheme fully, at the start of the financial year in April 2020. Councillor Marshall again requested that the officers bring the review at the earliest opportunity. CB did say that the benefit of an early review would be that it could act as pre-planning for the following Council Tax estimates.

The report seeks approval for

Recommendation agreed.

Voting

None.