



'Homes for the Future' Housing Strategy

2019 - 2022

Introduction

At Dacorum Borough Council, we are committed to our role as a local leader in housing provision and regulation. We aim to meet the challenges and opportunities of the wider housing sector, and work towards the best possible outcomes for people living in Dacorum.

This three-year strategy focuses on people, setting out how we can influence the housing options available to them across the borough. It provides a positive, clear vision for ensuring quality, safe and affordable homes for Dacorum residents.

This strategy provides an evidence base and introduces four key, outcome-based commitments, which the housing service will work in partnership to deliver over the next three years.

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I am pleased to introduce our Housing Strategy 2019-2022. Throughout this strategy, we outline how we will work in partnership to deliver safe, affordable homes for Dacorum residents, support them to maintain successful tenancies and work towards efficient, effective housing services.

Councillor Margaret Griffiths



The Vision for Housing in Dacorum

Our vision is that *'...People living in Dacorum have access to a safe, affordable home that meets their needs and they feel supported and empowered to speak up and have their voice heard.'*

This Housing Strategy supports the councils corporate vision of *'...working in partnership to create a borough that enables Dacorum's communities to thrive and prosper''*.

By focusing on the development of quality, affordable homes for those most in need, we can support the evolution of strong and vibrant communities across Dacorum. Ensuring that homes meet required standards means that residents can thrive in safe and clean environments, encouraging economic growth and prosperity. By continuing to consider how we can improve the housing services we deliver, we are driving forward progress towards becoming an increasingly efficient and modern council.

This strategy will cover a three-year period and will be reviewed following the development of a new Dacorum Borough Council Corporate Plan in 2021.



The National and Local Context

Government Policy and Consultation

The government has recognised the need to address the UK's housing crisis. In 2017, they published *'Fixing our Broken Housing Market'*, a White Paper which set out plans to drive forward the building of new homes at a faster pace, and support local authority planning departments to effectively challenge building developers who don't deliver. In 2018, the government published its Green Paper *'A New Deal for Social Housing'*. This highlights the importance of ensuring safe and decent homes, effective complaints resolution, tackling social housing stigma and proposals to strengthen the regulator. The Green Paper consultation closed in November 2018 and results will be published in 2019.

As a local authority, it is crucial that we continue to champion the provision of homes at social rent for those who need them, as well as working closely with local housing partners to deliver truly affordable homes for local people.



In the Wake of Grenfell Tower

The Grenfell Tower tragedy moved affordable housing into the spotlight, not only with regard to fire safety and building compliance, but also with a renewed focus on the importance of effective resident involvement. Dame Judith Hackitt's report *'Building a Safer Future: Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety'* identifies the need for tighter regulation and a visible 'golden thread' when it comes to building and compliance information. Developing excellent knowledge and understanding of the housing stock we manage is key in continuing to ensure the health and safety of our tenants and leaseholders, as well as providing best value for money through repairs and maintenance programmes.

Both the review carried out by Dame Judith Hackitt and the Social Housing Green Paper highlight the importance of re-asserting the role of residents and creating conversations that matter. At Dacorum, we have strong foundations in engagement, having become the first organisation to achieve the TPAS Pro Landlord Accreditation in 2017. As a landlord, we must continue to develop our engagement offer, ensuring that we are working with tenants to improve processes and make the right decisions when it comes to their homes and the services we deliver. TPAS, and other organisations representing tenants' interests, are actively supporting tenants to have a voice on a national level, such as responding to government consultations that influence housing policy. As a social landlord, we aspire to build on our existing approach to tenant engagement and empower our tenants to have their voice heard at a national level.



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An Ageing Population and Tackling Loneliness

Across Dacorum there are approximately 65,000 properties housing over 153,000 people and more than 15% are aged 65 and over. Projection figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) suggest that this is likely to grow significantly over the next 20 years, predicting an increase of 60% in people aged 65 and over living in the borough.

As the likelihood of developing disabilities or mobility issues is known to increase with age, the projected rise in over 65's in Dacorum highlights the importance of creating homes that are progressively more suitable for older people and which can be easily adapted for those with physical mobility needs.

Within the recently published '*A Connected Society – A Strategy for Tackling Loneliness*', the government have identified loneliness as "one of the greatest public health challenges of our time", specifically finding older people and those aged 16 – 24 as groups most likely to suffer from it. Research shows that loneliness can negatively affect physical, mental and social wellbeing. This, in turn, increases the pressure on key public services, such as the NHS and Social Care, as well as influencing people's ability to maintain a tenancy.

With the full roll out of Universal Credit across Dacorum due to take place during this strategy period, it is crucial that as a housing landlord we are working with tenants to deliver a holistic service, and support them in addressing issues that may impact their ability to sustain a successful tenancy.

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Homelessness and the Private Sector

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 placed renewed emphasis on the prevention of homelessness by introducing new statutory duties for local authorities. The new duties mean that we can be proactive in preventing homelessness by acting sooner and developing a more personalised approach to addressing housing concerns. On a national scale, one of the most common causes of homelessness is the end of a tenancy in the private rented sector, accounting for a 74% growth in households across England who qualify for temporary accommodation since 2010.

Across all privately rented properties in Dacorum, the Local Housing Allowance rate falls below the rent level by between 15 – 25%, and our homelessness statistics reflect the national picture, in that more than 35% of those accepted as homeless throughout 2017-18 lost their last settled home due to the termination of an assured shorthold tenancy.

The housing service has recently developed a new Private Sector Housing Team, tasked with tackling rogue landlords and addressing poor property conditions that affect the health and wellbeing of Dacorum residents. As need for more affordable housing continues to grow and resources struggle to meet demand, it is increasingly important that we work to develop a private rented sector that offers a safe and accessible housing option for people living in Dacorum.





Delivering a Great Service

Equality and Diversity

As a local authority, we believe that all Dacorum residents should have access to safe, affordable housing, regardless of; age, disability, gender, race, religion, belief or sexual orientation (Equality and Diversity Act 2010). We are committed to being inclusive in all services we offer, ensuring that our policies, procedures and working practices reflect this. When developing or reviewing our housing services, we take the different and varying needs of local people into account.

Value for Money

It is important to us that we deliver value for money for our tenants and those accessing other housing services. Taking an outcome focused approach to delivering housing services means that we can capture where improvements have been made, as well as any associated costs or savings. Shaping our annual service plans using our tenants' priorities, and working to identify more efficient ways of delivering services (e.g. moving to digital channels where possible), supports us to maximise resources available.

Striving for Best Practice

As a service, we always aim to be the best we can be at what we do. During the previous *Housing Strategy* period, we have achieved a number of accreditations, awards and certifications including:

- National Practitioner Support Service (NPSS) Gold Award for Homelessness Services;
- Centre for Housing Support Three Star Excellence Standard;
- TPAS Pro Landlord Accreditation;
- RSPCA Community Animal Welfare (CAWF) Gold and Platinum Footprint; and
- ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standards.

During this next strategy period, we aim to maintain these standards, as well identifying any further opportunities for continuous improvement of the services we deliver.

The Commitments

To develop this strategy we considered a number of key changes in the housing sector, on both a national and local scale, as well as the needs of the service. Through our Tenants and Leaseholders Survey we were also able to shape this further by identifying trends within our tenants' satisfaction and their thoughts on what our priorities should be.

From this we have developed four, outcome based commitments:

Commitment 1: We work in partnership to meet the demand for quality, affordable housing in Dacorum

Commitment 2: We proactively and effectively tackle poor conditions across Dacorum's private housing sector

Commitment 3: We understand our housing stock and use it to provide the right homes to meet tenant's needs

Commitment 4: We support and empower our Dacorum Borough Council tenants

These commitments will underpin this strategy and ultimately enable us to deliver our vision: *'...People living in Dacorum have access to a safe, affordable home that meets their needs and they feel supported and empowered to speak up and have their voice heard.'*



The Commitments

Commitment 1: We work in partnership to meet the demand for quality, affordable housing in Dacorum

Commitment 1 of the *Housing Strategy* looks at how we can address the demand for affordable homes across the borough.

Effective joint working with local partners is crucial in making sure that people in our communities have access to a home through the development of new, affordable properties. Ensuring that local partners are all working towards the same goal is also key to providing people with the housing support they need.

To achieve this, we will:

- Write and start to implement a new Housing Development Strategy which will set out our plans for providing new homes in Dacorum
- Work with local housing associations to develop and encourage buy in to an updated Strategic Tenancy Policy, which will outline an approach to effective joint working
- Identify and utilise underused garage sites to build new homes for local people at social rent
- Work more closely with our planning department colleagues, offering advice on the affordable housing elements of section 106 agreements

Commitment 2: We proactively and effectively tackle poor conditions across Dacorum's private housing sector

Commitment 2 of the *Housing Strategy* focuses on the development of our approach to regulating and improving conditions in the private housing sector in Dacorum.

It is important that we build a robust approach to tackling rogue landlords and strive to ensure that the private sector offers a safe and suitable housing option for Dacorum residents.

To achieve this, we will:

- Develop a Private Sector Housing Strategy which sets out how we will tackle rogue landlords and sub-standard property conditions
- Work with landlords to identify and appropriately license all Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) across the borough
- Explore the option of developing a Local Lettings Agency to bridge the gap and provide supported access to the private rented sector
- Review our approach to supporting tenancy sustainment in the private rented sector across Dacorum

The Commitments

Commitment 3: We understand our housing stock and use it to provide the right homes to meet tenant's needs

Commitment 3 of the *Housing Strategy* shows how we will work to make best use of our housing stock to meet the needs of our tenants.

Ensuring that we are making effective use of the properties we manage is key to delivering housing services that offer value for money. By reviewing our current stock and making improvements to maintenance programmes, we can work towards an increasingly efficient and cost-effective housing service.

To achieve this, we will:

- Drive forward our Asset Management Strategy which outlines our approach to utilising and developing our stock in an efficient way
- Carry out a stock condition survey across all properties which can inform effective planning of future repairs and maintenance programmes
- Manage the balance between under-occupying and overcrowding in our properties by reviewing our 'Moving to a Smaller Home' scheme
- Review our approach to managing the disabled adaptations process, identifying where we can make smarter choices in order to make best use of our existing housing stock

Commitment 4: We support and empower our Dacorum Borough Council tenants

Commitment 4 of the *Housing Strategy* emphasizes the importance of empowering and supporting our tenants.

Understanding the needs and priorities of our tenants is key to effectively targeting any support and communication they need. By building on our strong foundations in engagement, we can provide personalized support and work to strengthen their voices on key issues.

To achieve this, we will:

- Implement our new Sustainable Tenancies Strategy which sets out how we will work with tenants to ensure they thrive in their homes
- Develop a robust approach to tenancy audits, working with tenants to collect and update information that will allow us to build a better picture of their needs
- Design targeted approaches to engaging with those who have been found most likely to suffer from loneliness (elderly and ages 16 – 24)
- Develop a new Tenant Involvement Strategy which builds on our approach to engagement and sets out how we can facilitate our tenants participation at a national level

Moving Forward

Within this strategy, Dacorum Borough Council commits to driving forward positive changes to the housing services we deliver.

By *'working in partnership to meet the demand for quality, affordable housing in Dacorum'*, we can lead the delivery and supply of new homes for local residents. Through *'proactively and effectively tackling poor conditions across Dacorum's private housing sector'*, we can ensure that the private sector provides a safe and accessible housing option. By *'understanding our housing stock and using it to provide the right homes to meet tenant's needs'*, we can work to 'future-proof' our assets and ensure long term effectiveness of services we deliver. As a result of *'supporting and empowering our Dacorum Borough Council tenants'*, we can encourage successful and sustainable tenancies, ensuring the wellbeing of our tenants and work with them to make better decisions and improve services.

This strategy will be monitored by the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HCOSC), who will receive an annual update on progress against the stated commitments.

