

Public Document Pack

DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

22 JANUARY 2020

Present:

MEMBERS:

Councillor Williams (Leader) Councillors, Adeleke, Allen, Anderson, Banks, Barrett, Barry, Mrs Bassadone, Beauchamp, Birnie, Herbert Chapman, Claughton, Douris, Durrant, Elliot, England, Freedman, Griffiths, Guest, P Hearn, Hobson, Hollinghurst, Johnson, Link, Mahmood, Mahmood, McDowell, Peter, Pringle, Ransley, Riddick, Rogers, Silwal, Sinha, Stevens, G Sutton, R Sutton, Symington, Taylor, Timmis, Tindall, Townsend, Uttley, Woolner and C Wyatt-Lowe

OFFICERS:

Corporate and Democratic Support Officer, Assistant Director - Corporate and Contracted Services, Corporate Director - Finance and Operations, Corporate Director - Housing & Regeneration, Group Manager (Legal & Corporate Services) and Chief Executive

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

1 MINUTES

There were no minutes available to be signed at this meeting.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

4 ANNOUNCEMENTS

4.1 By the Mayor:

“In the lead up to Christmas I attended a number of carol services. On Christmas Day morning I attended two elderly persons care homes, Fire Stations and the Salvation Army.

Last week we had an excellent quiz night. Thank you to everyone that attended to support Sunnyside Rural Trust.

On Monday 27th January at 6pm in the market place there is a Holocaust Memorial to remember all those who have been affected by genocide. Everyone is welcome.

Tring Park presents KIPPS, the new half a sixpence musical in February. It is an exceptional performance and tickets are selling fast.

Finally, the civic dinner will be held on 27 March at Pendley Manor. Please support if you can.”

4.2 By the Chief Executive:

None.

4.3 By the Group Leaders:

Councillor Williams confirmed that apologies had been received from Councillors Bhinder, Imarni, Oguchi, and Independent Member Councillor Maddern.

Councillor Tindall confirmed that apologies had been received from Councillor Bowden.

4.4 Council Leader and Members of the Cabinet:

Councillor Williams, Leader of the Council

Councillor Williams had nothing to report but welcomed questions.

Questions:

Councillor Tindall said he understood that South West Herts group of local authorities had made some decisions on the Governments housing targets and were making representations to the Secretary of State. He asked for an update if this rumour is true. Councillor Williams believed it was a rumour as he hadn't heard that South West Herts had come to a conclusion. He felt Dacorum's position had always been very clear and we would know more information after the joint meeting on 12 February.

Councillor Stevens said the saga of the multi storey car park in Berkhamsted continues and he read out an email from a resident who was also a member of the parking forum concerning the lack of lighting. He asked for the Leader to investigate the issue. Councillor Williams said he carried out a visit to the site last Wednesday evening at approximately 7pm and confirmed it was dark but there was no electricity to the car park to provide lighting. He agreed he would carry out enquiries and come back to him as soon as possible on the matter.

There were no further questions.

Councillor Banks, Portfolio Holder for Community and Regulatory Services

The Portfolio Holder presented her update as follows:

Environmental Community Protection- Operations

CHAIRMAN

As we are all aware fly tipping is a problem for many of our communities. The good news is that the waste enforcement team have purchased 10 new cameras to help fight fly tipping across the borough. These cameras will be used covertly.

These cameras should provide better evidence to aid future prosecutions. In the last month 10 fixed penalty notices have been issued and 5 PACE interviews have been undertaken for littering and fly tipping offences.

Air Quality Management

There is some early indication of improving air quality across our three monitored areas - Northchurch, London Road and Lawn Lane.

We have completed monitoring for 2019, but we cannot produce a full and final dataset until mid-2020. This is because data is subject to validation and ratification. Once this completed, if it demonstrates we are below the objective levels again, we can start to consider revoking some AQMA.

There is no clear reason for this improvement as there has been no change to the local circumstances or evidence of any clear actions. It may be the result of improvements in vehicle technology or individual's behaviours or both. I look forward to reporting back to Council once the 2019 data has been validated.

Food and Health & Safety - Enforcement Activity Update

Following Voluntary Closure of (Dragon Garden) a premises in the Marlowes at the end of November for Food Hygiene Offences. The place re-opened after 2 days with significant improvements to cleanliness. 10 legal notices were served. For food hygiene improvements in training, documented procedures, gas safety, electrical safety etc.). The business has been invited to attend an interview under caution later in January.

Unfortunately officers were obstructed at another premises in the Marlowes (Shirella's Eatery) to check compliance with notices. Officers may now seek a warrant to exercise their powers of entry accompanied by a Police Officer.

A premises in (The Red Lion) Nash Mills have withdrawn their appeal against a noise abatement notice served against them for outside events. The notice is now live. The premise has been a source of complaints over many years despite informal interventions from both Environmental Health and Licensing, the complaints continued. On a positive note, since the service of the legal notice, no new complaints have been received by the Council.

Turning to **People and Communities Group Service**

Community Safety and Children Services, the adventure playgrounds, I am pleased to inform members -

Grovehill will be replacing all wooden play structures, funded by approved s106 money and 3G Sports Pitches for Adeyfield and Grovehill have seen their Tenders released to Market, looking to award contract in February.

CHAIRMAN

May I remind members - **Annual Staff Recognition Scheme** – has now opened for all staff and Members to nominate staff under various categories such as apprentice of the year, employee of the year, Health and Safety champion?

Community partnerships and Leisure

Mr Mayor I would like to draw the attention of members to Hertfordshire Year of culture 2020

Dacorum raised the HYOC2020 flag outside the Forum to see in Herts Year of Culture in January. The year launched with The January challenge online – 31 days of short creative challenges.

I am pleased to advise DBC, Watford and Three Rivers have been successful in getting £50k of funding for a cross-district intergenerational dance project. To get this level of funding on first application is unusual, so we are really pleased. The strong partnership is likely to have influenced the outcome and I would like to record my thanks to Officers involved in this bid.

We have held the first meeting of the Forum Choir, open (free of charge) to all people working in the Forum (not just DBC). This is being run in partnership with the library and Hertfordshire Music Service; initiated by DBC.

The Old Town Hall

Café – Reviewing options to provide this service in the New Year. We will work alongside new Arts Operation Lead Officer to help shape the future.

Ticket sales and Hires – On target and will surpass last year's numbers.

Customer Services

Fully staffed and all KPIs on achieved in December.

The Portfolio Holder invited questions.

Questions:

Councillor Beauchamp asked if the Portfolio Holder would agree that the PSPO's were working towards making the Marlowes a safer place for visitors and shoppers and asked for a progress update. Councillor Banks said she was pleased to report that those on patrol had been engaging with individuals and making improvements, however they had also issued 5 warnings, 4 fixed penalties and 1 community protection warning notice.

Councillor Tindall asked if there were any plans to do anything with the rake in the auditorium at the Old Town Hall as it was quite steep and it could prevent people attending. Councillor Banks said she would keep him informed of any progress.

Councillor Guest asked if the Portfolio Holder agreed that the Christmas light switch on events help build community spirit and asked how the business community can be further engaged in such events. Councillor Banks said the events had been a huge success and particularly in her Ward of Grovehill they had involved the local

CHAIRMAN

businesses, Church family, Rotary Club and residents to make it a big public event. She felt confident that this was happening in other Wards.

Councillor Hollinghurst asked if it would be possible to have marked cycle routes so that we can encourage a sustainable mode of transport. Councillor Banks replied works were still in progress on this matter but cycling would always be encouraged and supported by the Council.

Councillor Birnie said they had problems with cyclists in Queens Square in Adeyfield and asked if the Portfolio Holder would look to extend the PSPO's for other areas. Councillor Banks said she had sight of some emails about the issue in Queens Square and had asked officers to look at what steps can be taken for that area.

Councillor Williams, Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Contracted Services

Councillor Williams said he was going to mention Berkhamsted Sports Centre but it was subject to a separate Cabinet report this evening. He then expressed his appreciation to the Elections Team for the success of the three Elections held in 2019, one being in December which was a surprise. He said everyone coped really well and the count went very smoothly.

The Portfolio Holder invited questions.

Questions:

Councillor Stevens asked when the Town Council would be able to have a joint meeting with the Borough Council regarding the consultation for Berkhamsted Sports Centre. Councillor Williams said the consultation and the next stage of the project was approved at Cabinet last week and meeting dates will be agreed mutually. He added that public consultation will commence in the spring.

Councillor G Sutton, Portfolio Holder for Planning & Infrastructure

The Portfolio Holder presented his update as follows:

HEMEL HEMPSTEAD TOWN CENTRE CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

- Christmas, the Christmas lights switch on was- changed to Saturday (from Sunday in the previous years) and ran until 7pm. All who fed back were positive about these changes – There was an increase in footfall of 2000 people from last year (Marlowes Data)
- Now that the Hemel Hempstead Town Centre BID is in place, the event benefited from its input with DBC, the BID, the Market Operator, Marlowes and The Riverside shopping centres working together to deliver what was a very successful event. It provides a great platform to help us all work together to improve the event year on year.

SOUTH WEST HERTS JOINT STRATEGIC PLAN

CHAIRMAN

- As Members may be aware, this is a joint initiative between Dacorum, St Albans, Hertsmere, Watford and Three Rivers and Hertfordshire County Council to look at the future shape and extent of development that may be needed in South West Herts, and how we can work together to secure the best locations for development and address wider infrastructure needs in the long term, to around 2050.
- Just a reminder that there will be a briefing for all Members on 12 February 2020 in the Council Chamber, starting at 7.30 pm and I would encourage you all to attend.

DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL IN HEMEL HEMPSTEAD

- Last month, on the 5th December, the Go Smart project, a two year project to promote sustainable travel choices and solutions, was launched at The Maylands Building.
- A partnership initiative between DBC, HCC, SADC and Hertfordshire LEP/Herts IQ, the project is developing solutions to give people choices about their travel as an alternative to single-occupancy car and other vehicle use.
- The project has started looking at improving sustainable transport links between Hemel Hempstead station, the Town Centre and Maylands. It will pilot some innovative solutions working with businesses at Maylands.

CONSERVATION SUCCESS IN LEVERSTOCK GREEN

- Finally, I would like to draw to Members' attention a success story which has brought new life back to Frog Island in Leverstock Green, a grade II listed building which dates from the 17th century.
- The building appears to have been originally a single bay timber framed cottage later extended in the 18th century.
- Used as a summer house in the early 20th century, by 2010 it was in such a poor condition it had to be restored as part of a redevelopment on the site.
- Working closely with the new owner's builder, the Council's Officers agreed a comprehensive scheme of repair. The building turned out to have been in a worse condition than initially thought. The roof had to be completely stripped, cement ceilings, which were causing the roof to sag, removed and replaced with lightweight breathable materials. Walls cleaned and re-plastered, timber repair works, repointing and most of the windows replaced. Working closely with the builder much of the original historic fabric was preserved, the cottage successfully restored and brought back into an ancillary use.
- The photos show the building before, during and after the works and I hope you will agree with me that this is a success story of collaborative working between the site owner and the Council to restore this small but significant part of the rich building heritage we have in the Borough.

CHAIRMAN

- Please don't ask me how the building got the name "Frog Island" but after some extensive research I found reference to it on a website called "Local Drove Roads" the item picks up from a description of a drover's road from Cupid Green Lane.:-
- So, disappointment...? No, far from it. CGL would have led, in its drunken fashion, south to Frogs Island in Leverstock Green at the bottom RH corner of Hemel - and there, in the back garden of a modern house, for Heaven's sake, is the most perfect little drovers' annexe. (#4,5) It is C17/18, says Historic England, & was originally the property of the Red Lion, a field away, which used it, according to Barbara Chapman, as "accommodation for ostlers". Well, maybe the odd ostler slept there, but WE know who it was for, don't we?
And I bet the owners of the houses on that field separating the Red Lion from the annexe have gardens with rich soil...
- I think that there may be some reference to "Wild Oats" associated with this quaint little cottage!



Questions:

Councillor Cloughton asked what system was in place to monitor and enforce compliance in relation to the requirement to plant more trees. Councillor Sutton advised that they were currently reviewing the trees and woodlands policy and the requirement for new developments to have more trees planted than removed. Councillor Cloughton asked what the point of the policy was if it wasn't being

CHAIRMAN

monitored and enforced. Councillor Sutton advised it wasn't policy yet but it was part of the Local Plan.

Councillor Ransley asked why objections weren't made by DBC in relation to the Luton Airport planning site. Councillor Sutton advised that strong objections were made by DBC and he would try and make them available for Councillor Ransley to view.

Councillor Elliot, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources

The Portfolio Holder presented his update as follows:

Financial Services

The Council Tax base for 2020/21 was approved by Cabinet in December, completing the first stage of the process for the setting of Council Tax for 2020/21.

Growth in the Council tax base has exceeded expectation over the last 12 months, and the latest projections suggest that this trend of accelerated growth will continue into next year. Growth in the tax base leads to growth in council tax revenues for the council, providing additional resources to support front line services.

The second stage of this process is the formal approval of budgets and proposed Council Tax levels for 2020/21

Draft budget proposals were presented to Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee in early December for comment and feedback. These draft proposals detailed a balanced budget position for 20/21, delivering on the savings target of £780k whilst continuing to protect front line services.

The draft budget papers in December were produced before Central Government released any details on council funding for next financial year, and so were necessarily predicated on assumptions.

On 20 December 2019, the Secretary of State announced the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2020/21. The announcement confirmed the funding assumptions within the DBC draft budget were accurate, and that no change would be required to the draft budget proposals.

The most significant assumptions that were in the December draft and that can now progress are:

- The council tax referendum threshold for districts is at the higher of £5 or 2% - £5 for DBC
- That negative RSG would continue to be funded by Central Government in 2021 – one-off funding that enables DBC to proceed with the £1.6m contribution to reserves outlined at the Joint OSC in December

The finance team is now in the process of preparing the final budget proposals for consideration in February.

CHAIRMAN

As the Council enters the final quarter of the financial year, the Finance Team is now beginning to focus on the closure of the Council's accounts for 2019/20.

Commercial Assets and Property Development.

Commercial Assets Service.

The service continues to work hard with tenants to strike the challenging balance between the commercial and social implications of its commercial assets.

The very real contribution the Estates team makes to supporting our local communities and shopping parades through a difficult retail environment is demonstrated by its maintaining an occupancy rate in excess of 95% for the council's commercial units, whilst at the same time exceeding a challenging income target of £5m – the Council's largest income stream.

This service is involved in 2 key strategic projects that have continued to progress during December;

1. Bunkers Park Cemetery

Although the wet weather has continued through December the construction programme of the new cemetery at Bunkers Park has continued and is on schedule and progressing well for completion shortly. Final planting will be undertaken in early spring 2020 to benefit from milder drier weather conditions, and then the new cemetery, to be called Poppy Fields, will open in late summer.

2. Garage Disposals

As part of the next phase of the Garage Disposal Strategy, 18 sites were reviewed by Housing Associations to assess viability.

Further to that initial appraisal and subject to contract, Heads of Terms have been agreed with Thrive Homes for the purchase of 7 sites to develop much needed affordable homes for the Borough. Solicitors have been instructed on behalf of the respective parties and are working through pre-contract due diligence and enquiries.

Revenues and Benefits service

The revenues & benefits teams are continuing to work effectively, and are starting preparations for the 2020/21 annual billing and benefit uprating processes.

In the Queens speech prior to Christmas the Government announced a desire to increase in the business rates discount available for retailers from one third to one half of the bill. The exact details of this change have not yet been provided, but the team are hopeful that it will be received in time to be able to include the increased discount on the first bills sent for 2020/21.

We also continue to wait for information about the next phase of the universal credit rollout, which will move people onto UC even if they do not have a change in their circumstances. This is currently scheduled to take place between November 2020 and December 2023, but no information about when this will impact Dacorum residents has been announced.

CHAIRMAN

The Portfolio Holder invited questions.

Questions:

Councillor Birnie asked how many dwellings were responsible for the growth in the Band D tax base. Councillor Elliot advised there had been growth over 700 Band D's and projected growth in 20/21 of 1% which equates to 600 properties.

Councillor Adeleke asked how the name Poppy Fields was selected for the new cemetery. Councillor Sutton said there was a request to come up with a name for the cemetery and Councillor Rosie Sutton researched the site; it was covered with Poppies in season so it seemed the most appropriate name for it.

Councillor Griffiths, Portfolio Holder for Housing

The Portfolio Holder presented her update as follows;

TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER SERVICES

- Following formal consultation the Anti-social Behaviour team has moved from Environmental and Community Protection to Housing. This will improve the service residents receive and prevent duplication between the teams when dealing with cases involving council tenants. A more detailed briefing will be prepared and circulated to members to clarify the roles and responsibilities of this and the other teams involved in nuisance behaviour across the council.
- Following the rent free weeks the housing income team have continued to perform well under increased pressure from Universal Credit. Over 1100 tenants are now receiving their housing costs directly and while arrears for this group are higher than those on Housing Benefit, the levels have reduced on the last quarter due to persistence from income Officers and the Universal Credit Officer. Former tenant arrears as a percentage of annual debit are also down to 0.73% from 1.35% showing a reduction in the amount owed from tenants who are no longer living in a council property.
- Following analysis of rent arrears, further research has been carried out into what support may be needed by tenants who are 18-25 to sustain their tenancies. A number of tenants were involved in this process and have led to outcomes such as reviewing the advice given prior to being allocated a home and more support to set up utilities, apply for any benefits and adjust in the first few months of a new tenancy. We expect these changes to increase young tenants confidence and ability to maintain independence and sustain their first council home.

STRATEGIC HOUSING

- An additional £69,017 grant has been secured from MHCLG to enable delivery of a PRS Housing stock model report and associated project work
- In the six months since the introduction of the RSI funding to help us tackle rough sleeping, there has been a 50% reduction in rough sleeper numbers across the borough

CHAIRMAN

- We have successfully assessed the first two clients against the Housing First model, properties have been identified in December 2019, with furnishing and move in complete early 2020
- Successful partnership work with Hightown Housing Association has seen 98% occupancy of the latest new build development at Peregrine Court following focussed allocations by the service

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Kylina Court	Mobilising 12 month defects inspections
Corn Mill Court	Final Account in draft agreement. Car Park open. Final Party Wall works progressing.
Martindale	Progressing well on site. Completion July 2020.
Northend & Westerdale	Progressing well on site. Completion April 2020.
Magenta Court	Progressing well on site. Completion April/May 2020.
Paradise Fields	Close to completing land purchase, design team commenced Stage 2
Gaddesden Row	Contractor approved, Looking to start on site Feb 20
Eastwick Row	Out to tender for Principal Contractor
Coniston Road	Submitted for Planning – Goes to Committee on 30 th Jan
Resource	Reuel Thompsom starting as Lead Officer on 3 rd Feb
Other	Planning 300 new homes delivered event for the Summer

PROPERTY AND PLACE

- Consultant in place and garages management from both customer perspective and DBC management process.
- Garage lets per month are starting to increase up from 16 in July & August to 30 in November

GARAGE	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November
TERMINATIONS	58	51	48	41	34	63	55	50

CHAIRMAN

COMMENCEMENTS	16	8	3	16	16	22	23	30
---------------	----	---	---	----	----	----	----	----

- Programmed works progressing well with Year to date element completions
 - Kitchens 240
 - Bathrooms 212
 - Windows 26
 - Doors 297
- Additional fire upgrade projects and external wall insulation projects on site
 - Electrical testing EICR programme 2017-2019 - Total properties requiring an EICR 10115 properties
 - An EICR has been completed 93% of Total properties and the remainder are in the access process.
 - Remainder are being worked through for both any remedial works and/or EICR
- Over 600 properties have received upgraded smoke alarm installations (LD2 standard)

The Portfolio Holder invited questions.

Questions:

Councillor England shared details of a 97 year old individual with mobility problems living on the first floor in Evelyn Sharp House sheltered scheme. He said the lift had been out of service for 14 days now and he asked how this was allowed to happen. Councillor Griffiths apologised to the tenants at Evelyn Sharp House for the inconvenience and gave reassurance that staff at Dacorum were doing all they could to resolve the issue. She said staff had arranged for GP's to go to the scheme and HCC were also aware. She explained that some of the schemes do not have lifts in them as they are not required to, and they will always do what they can to help tenants. She added that lessons will be learnt from this.

Councillor England asked if the Portfolio Holder agreed that a review of the housing risk register was urgently needed. Councillor Griffiths advised that we had a closed system at present but we couldn't change everything immediately and the lift in question was closed protocol. She added that lessons are always learnt and issues will be rectified as soon as possible.

Councillor Anderson, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services

The Portfolio Holder presented his update as follows:

Thank you Mr Mayor for the enjoyable quiz night and Councillor G Sutton for the questions.

Refuse

CHAIRMAN

The Christmas bank holidays arrangement worked well.

Pleased to report that the Love Food, Hate Waste 2019 challenge worked extremely well and over 90% of participants saying they were more food savvy and changed their behaviours.

Commercial Waste – those on the SPAE OSC in previous years will know we have been losing income in competition with the private sector. We have commissioned experts to help us and officers were currently benchmarking the service prior to drawing up options for improvement which will be presented to the OSC. He has asked officers to include recycling, and food recycling from restaurants.

Vehicle Fleet

The new refuse trucks have arrived and have started doing the refuse rounds. When works have been completed on the VRS later this year, tours of Cupid Green will be organised for members.

CSG

More A41 litter signs to be arranged.

In talks with officers about the Graffiti clearance policy.

The pathways to Grovehill playing field refurbished with hardcore wild flowers.

Good news in regards to trees - 70 new trees planted/will be planted in January and February.

Most council house works involving roofs will now automatically include implementation of swift boxes.

In relation to Chalk Streams, a letter has been sent to the Environment Agency.

The Portfolio Holder invited questions.

Questions:

Councillor Tindall asked if the commercial waste experts could consider the provision for a full service for businesses at Jarman Park and the rest of the Borough. Councillor Anderson explained that the advice received from the experts was based on our existing service but he was hoping we could consider implementing recycling and particularly food recycling for restaurants around the Borough.

Councillor Tindall asked if it was possible to look at an action plan to charge the telephone companies for the cleaning of their telephone boxes. Councillor Anderson said he was keen to adopt a policy on the matter.

Councillor Uttley referred to the 42 containers of plastic waste that was smuggled into Malaysia and sent back to the UK. She asked if the Herts Waste Partnership had taken steps to uncover whether any of the companies responsible were directly or indirectly part of the supply chain. Councillor Anderson explained that the Herts Waste Partnership compiled a briefing on the HCC website which details what proportion of plastic waste in Hertfordshire is exported. He said he had personally raised the issue

CHAIRMAN

at the meetings of the Herts Waste Partnership and it is something he feels very strongly about. He advised that the Chief Executive, the Leader and himself had been invited to the Herts Waste Partnership annual conference at the end of this month and one of the speakers is the person responsible for recycling so that will be a good opportunity to quiz him.

Councillor Stevens referred to the expansion at Luton Airport and asked if the council had responded to the consultation. Councillor Anderson said it wasn't his portfolio but advised that the council have done or will be sending a detailed submission. He felt we were in a difficult position as we want to support growth but we have to consider the impact on residents.

5 MOTION

The following Motion was proposed by Councillor England, and seconded by Councillor Barry:

1. This Council notes that Universal Credit, the single monthly benefit payment which replaces the six current working age benefits, has now been implemented across most of the country, but has yet to be rolled out to all benefits claimants in Dacorum.

2. This council further notes that within Dacorum the number of people affected is likely to be in the thousands and is concerned that the full implementation of Universal Credit in Dacorum is likely to prove seriously detrimental to the health and wellbeing of those thousands of local residents.

3. In recognition of this and of the fact that the move to full implementation of Universal Credit in other parts of the country has resulted in considerable financial hardship for many of those people moving onto this new system of benefit payments; council requests that before the full roll-out of Universal Credit across the Borough of Dacorum, measures are found to alleviate hardship caused by -

a. The five week wait for claimants to receive their benefits.

b. Payments going to one named member of a household.

c. The rent element of benefit being included in payments to Claimants

4. To support the measures taken to alleviate hardship, the council requests that an additional financial provision be included in the budget for 2020/2021 to provide for hardship payments and/or loans.

5. In addition, Council requests that the Leaders of the Political Groups of the Council write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to urge that amendments to Universal Credit be introduced that will -

a. End benefit sanctions as there is no evidence that sanctioning helps people into work.

b. Allow all new claimants to apply for Universal Credit in job centres supported by trained job centre staff rather than forcing new claimants to apply on-line.

c. Abandon the in-work conditionality for part-time or low paid workers.

CHAIRMAN

d. Increase the overall level to which Universal Credit is funded.

Councillor England read the following statement:

“Universal credit has been in the headlines again and again since it was first announced in 2010.

The UC project has cost many times more than originally predicted and implementation has taken far longer than expected. There are clearly many problems.

We as a Council can do our part to help get to solutions: We know our community best, so on behalf of the residents of Dacorum it's right that we add our voice to the wider lived-experience that the status-quo with the coming of UC in present form is not working as imagined, for our people and needs further changes before it is rolled out to Housing Benefit and Tax Credits transfers here.

As a major stock-holding Authority, Dacorum is a big landlord, facing the full effect of the impact of UC on rent arrears if people lose control of their budgeting.

It is important that we try to use the perspective of a UC Claimant:

The design of universal credit is supposed to “mimic” the world of work, where most people are paid monthly in arrears.

The rationale for introduction of UC was to simplify a complex system of multiple payments, but ten years after the idea was originally presented, the major effect has been to complicate the lives of mostly low-paid, often crisis-hit individuals, who have suddenly lost confidence and are without the resilience they would possess if they were in easier circumstances.

This vision is unrealistic for a poor person who has lost their job and urgently needs support. It also fails to recognise that many low earners are paid more frequently—only half of them are paid every month.

Under the old, multi-benefit system many faced a "cliff edge", (coming off benefits) where people on a low income would lose a big chunk of their benefits in one go as soon as they started working more than 16 hours. OK, that was not great..

But the cliff edge hasn't be re-moved – it has just been moved – to a really hard place!

In the new system, benefit payments are reduced at a consistent rate as income and earnings increase - for every extra £1 you earn after tax, you will lose 63p in benefits.

But cuts the system has been made significantly less generous since it was announced. Originally the gradient was designed to be much more gradual and more sensitive, at 36p in the pound.

People do not calculate decisions this way – we are not like economists; people over-respond to potential losses instinctively, and are under-incentivised by, er, “incentives”, or tapering.

Claimants also struggle with a process that has to be done online, with little more than half registering a claim without help. Then they wait five weeks to get their first payment. Many have no savings so request an advance and start off in debt.

By contrast, anyone claiming “old” out-of-work benefits would get help sooner and then receive it every fortnight.

CHAIRMAN

The housing-support component of UC is subject to the same rigid monthly timetable, whereas the benefit it is replacing should be paid within two weeks of a first claim and allows a variety of payment periods.

Recalculated each month, UC injects continuing uncertainty into the lives of those receiving it, making it harder to budget. If their pay is temporarily higher than expected one month, the benefit is cut the next. A similar problem can arise merely from the timing of different pay cycles: if wages come weekly, there are some months when workers get an extra payment of income.

Moreover - Transferring onto universal credit from the old system will mean a loss of at least £1,000 a year for 1.9 million adults, and a gain of at least £1,000 a year for 1.6 million adults, according to an April 2019 [report by independent think tank the Institute for Fiscal Studies](#).

Those with the lowest incomes stand to lose the most. Even if there are winners as well as losers, you have to look hard at who they are.

Dacorum's share of those numbers is likely to be 4,000 negatively-affected people (plus employment and demographic churn). (150k pop of Dacorum divided by 68m = 0.0022 = 0.22% of 1.9m)

This all comes back to the choice between incentivising choices – working WITH people or enforcing them. But enforcement costs money and people!

When people are in receipt of benefits, they spend them in the local community, so benefits contribute to the local economy. When income stops for 5 weeks, the local economy is hurt.

What can we do, what should we do, as a Council, (now)? (Motion, points 3 a-c)

Relying on the knowledge we have, I think we need to ask the DWP for the following changes:

A - The five-week wait does not work. (Low paid people are much more likely to be receiving wages weekly) The Liberal Democrats have said we would like to see the Govt reduce the much-criticised five-week wait for claimants to receive their first UC payment to just five days.

B – We should remove the risk of UC being used to perpetrate Domestic Abuse. 21st Century Households are more complex than the system is equipped to meet. People are individual – and economic domestic abuse is enabled by the one person per household rule. If there is an attempt to replicate a self-sufficient working household, at least two people could be earning independently, so why cannot Universal Credit work the same way?

C – (I do appreciate that Dacorum has an Officer focussing on this.)

If we know that rent needs to be paid direct, does that mean we now just do it, like they do in Scotland and Northern Ireland? I accept that there are some mitigating activities being undertaken here in Dacorum, but only when there is already evidence of a concern, so some people could slip through the net. Perhaps the PH can clarify?

(point 4)

CHAIRMAN

If the Government chooses not to address the issues mentioned in part 3 of this Motion, provision needs to have been made in our Budget, to provide hardship payments or loans.

By doing so, we can hope to keep local people positive and bring some balance to this situation.

Will the Council earmark a Reserve for hardship payments – and shouldn't we – in doing so - ask the Government to fund it (because it is patching-up their own surgery?)

There are four more potential “asks” suggested in this Motion. (5 a-d) (Idea was this gave scope for Tories to amend to their strength of requests)

a. End benefit sanctions as there is no evidence that sanctioning helps people into sustainable work. The CAB is calling for people to be supported, not sanctioned. We all know that the way out of a hole is a helping hand, not a spadeful of dirt..

b. We should allow all new claimants to apply for Universal Credit in job centres supported by trained job centre staff rather than forcing new claimants to apply on-line. Channel-shift is not appropriate in a crisis and should be applied very sensitively. We could undertake this ourselves, and we should, because our community will be the better for it.

c. We must, as a critical friend, call on the Government to abandon the in-work conditionality for part-time or low paid workers. This is a new phenomenon of the benefits systems as it relates to Tax Credits, so could mean that if you refuse extra hours.. or do not continually seek extra hours, you could be penalised... (if the taper was put back to the original levels, people would be positively incentivised..)

d. The nub is: UC is under-funded; Govt needs to Increase the overall level to which Universal Credit is funded.

There needs to be an investment of at least £5 billion in improving the wider benefit system. People are a valuable resource when well-fitted in a role, so actually every successful intervention to help people find their way of contributing, is a win-win.

LDs have argued to prioritise tackling the crisis of child poverty by abolishing the cruel two-child limit for Universal Credit and ending the unfair benefits cap.

Universal Credit hasn't even started to be problematic in Dacorum yet, but it has already increased rent arrears.

It yokes together traditional out-of-work benefits with the more recently introduced tax credits that aim to prop up working incomes. Yet the systems are poles apart in how they operate. Integrating them requires a monthly adjustment of payments that introduces financial instability into the lives of those least able to cope with it.

The fact that UC, where introduced, has coincided with the rising use of food banks and rent arrears is no accident. The new benefit is neither simple nor clear for claimants, and—unlike before—they now have all their eggs in this single baffling basket.”

Councillor Hollinghurst agreed with the points raised by Councillor England. He pointed out that work in today's modern world has changed, people used to be paid weekly. There is now a large GIG economy which is hard for people whose income changes week to week. The economy is going reasonably well at the moment but a

CHAIRMAN

downturn could mean that people employed in the GIG economy find themselves with low level income and we could be faced with a tsunami of UC claims because of the five week wait.

Councillor Pringle thanked Councillor England for a comprehensive presentation of problems caused by UC. Lots of people claiming UC are in work but on a low income. Any one of us could end up on UC, this is not happening to other people, this is all of us. Whatever the intent may have been to introduce UC, it is quite clear from reports that they are actually draconian measures leading to misery and people feel they are being punished for being in poverty. Northchurch had no food bank usage until UC introduced and 19 families now have had to use one. It is not just food parcels but hygiene parcels as well and children are going to school and being bullied for being in poverty. The bravest thing to do is admit that this needs to be amended or changed to help not hinder people.

Councillor Banks said she spent some time in the customer service unit observing the team and how they work. She said she observed 18 calls and 8 were specifically to do with UC. These people seemed to be confident with the process and Councillor Banks said she asked them for their views and not one had a complaint about UC. One gentleman had an issue with going online, but the job centre were able to help. This experience will hopefully balance some of the criticisms. Some of the general public are understanding the process.

Councillor Barry said she supported this motion. This was not a criticism of how Dacorum as a borough has been working with UC as we have a good housing team. It is concerning that since UC has been brought in, food bank usage has increased. Youth workers giving out food vouchers and this should not be their role. The process should be made simpler, currently not thinking about people moving over to UC who have been previously used to regular payments and now having to wait 5 weeks. 5 weeks isn't how people get paid when in employment. The stress of this is causing mental health problems. Councillor Barry said she had friends on UC who have had to use their savings to pay off their rent arrears due to the 5 week waiting. This motion says to make it better and she echoed Councillor Pringle that it could be any of us.

Councillor Williams said he shared some concerns on aspects of Universal Credit. He said we were a large landlord and had over 10,000 properties, some of which will have tenants in receipt of UC. He explained that since the General Election and prior to this Motion he has raised these issues with the Hemel Hempstead MP to ask what the Government is doing to address the issues. He didn't feel it was appropriate for the Borough Council to be budgeting for UC payment support. Whilst he had sympathy for people suffering these issues he couldn't support the motion.

Councillor England said he had attended a climate change conference today and the key thing to come out was how different each local authority is from each other. It is good to see that the Leader is aware and conscious of the issues. We should be asking the government who have introduced this policy, you are causing problem and local authorities can't budget for that problem out of their own resources. It is stressful

CHAIRMAN

to lose a job without having to deal with UC. He said he understood the idea that we want to put some rigour into the process for those that do not take it seriously. He appealed to people in the room that this isn't achieved by sanctioning but by getting alongside people and showing them that they have something to offer to society. If we unlock that, we will be better off as a society. There is an opportunity here as UC has not been fully rolled out in Dacorum. This motion is not suggesting that we do anything, but that we say something and we need to say something.

A recorded vote was held:

18 for (Councillors Hollinghurst, Ransley, Townsend, Pringle, Link, McDowell, Claughton, Allen, Stevens, Taylor, Symington, Barry, Freedman, Woolner, England, Tindall, Hobson and Uttley)

28 against (Councillors Beauchamp, Williams, Sinha, Johnson, Peter, Barrett, Arslan, R Sutton, Bassadone, Timmis, Rogers, Durrant, Silwal, Adeleke, Guest, Wyatt-Lowe, Hearn, Riddick, Douris, Griffiths, Elliot, Anderson, Banks, G Sutton, Birnie, Chapman, Suqlain Mahmood and Sobaan Mahmood).

Therefore the Motion was lost.

6 QUESTIONS

Councillor Pringle asked the following question in writing to the Leader of the Council:

Protection of EU citizens' rights in Dacorum

In view of recent advice to the government, as outlined in House of Commons Library briefing paper No: 8772 (Annex 1 below) and the deadline for EU citizens to apply for settled status being just 18 months away (Annex 2 below), does the Leader agree that it is incumbent on all levels of government to take responsibility for assisting EU citizens who have built their lives in the UK?

Does the leader agree that DBC should be doing all we can to ensure those EU citizens resident in Dacorum can optimise their opportunities of successfully apply for settled status rights.

In particular:

1. Will the Leader ensure that Dacorum Borough Council will take all reasonable and necessary steps to assist EU citizens resident here, particularly the vulnerable, with applications for settled status?
2. In particular, will he pledge to introduce the following measures:
 1. Immediately provide easily accessible information and support to EU citizens on the DBC website. This would include a letter from the Leader to EU citizens outlining in plain language that EU citizens are welcome in Dacorum and the support that they can access in applying for settled status (such as the

CHAIRMAN

example set by the leader of Vale of White Horse District Council Annex 3) and links to government information.

2. Take immediate steps to publicise across Dacorum the risks that EU citizens face if they do not apply for settled status and the steps they should urgently take to do so.
3. Set up an urgent review of services to consider how DBC can further offer support to EU citizens in Dacorum in terms of:
 1. Helping with process
 2. Providing additional resources necessary, such as computer terminals in libraries for those who do not have the app
 3. Fast tracking requests for evidence of residence in Dacorum to support Settled Status applications and training staff to proactively assist such applicants
 4. Training staff to generally support and advise residents making such applications
 5. Commit to providing the funding necessary to reach out to vulnerable groups, such as
 1. providing grants to outreach groups and
 2. ensuring all DBC staff who work with the elderly, the homeless and residents with other vulnerabilities are trained in proactively offering appropriate support and identifying and supporting those at risk of failing to apply for settled status

ANNEX 1

Extract 1 from Briefing Paper No:8772 House of Commons Library
Commons Library Briefing, 3 January 2020

“The Home Office is undertaking a range of outreach and communications activities targeted towards EUSS applicants. But it has been estimated that about 30% of EU citizens may struggle with the EUSS application process, whether due to a lack of awareness of the scheme or difficulties making an application or proving their eligibility. They are therefore particularly vulnerable to losing their status and entitlements in the UK. Groups identified include the elderly, people with limited English, children and young people in the care system, homeless people, people who arrive soon before the deadline and people in casual employment.⁸

Another major concern the 3 million have is that the government has rejected calls to issue physical proof of status documents to people who successfully apply to the EUSS. Instead, they receive a digital status”

CHAIRMAN

ANNEX 2

Extract 2 from Briefing Paper No:8772 House of Commons Library Commons Library Briefing, 3 January 2020

2.3 Deadline for applying to the EUSS

Clause 7 allows Ministers to make regulations specifying a deadline for applications to the EUSS. The WA states that the deadline cannot be less than six months after the end of the transition period (therefore, 30 June 2021, unless extended). The government has been criticised for not setting out in any detail its intended approach towards people who miss that deadline.

ANNEX 3

Sample letter from Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council



An open letter from Cllr Emily Smith to residents and businesses in the Vale of White Horse

Dear Resident

The deadline for the UK to leave the EU has changed, but the country continues to prepare for this event. I am writing to you all on behalf of the Vale of White Horse District Council about issues related to Brexit - in particular we want to make sure affected EU nationals from countries outside the UK who live in our district know what they need to do to protect their rights to remain in the country.

The new deadline to leave the EU is 31 January 2020 at the latest, but it's still not clear exactly when we will leave or how we will leave, especially now there will be a general election in December. We share many of our residents' frustrations about this uncertainty, particularly over the future immigration status of affected EU nationals.

If you live in the UK but are a citizen of another EU country, it's very important you know what you need to do to be able to stay here after we leave the EU. You might need to apply to the government for "settled" or "pre-settled status" in the UK - if you do not do this as soon as possible, you might not be able to stay in the UK in the long term. We have put lots of information on our website to help, including links to the right pages on the government's website. You can find this at www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/brexit.

If you don't have access to a smartphone or tablet to carry out your identification verification, you can do this at the libraries in Abingdon, Botley, Wantage and Didcot.

Like all of our residents, you make an important contribution to our district and our communities - you are most welcome in the Vale of White Horse, and I want to let you know you have the Council's continued support.

I also want to reassure all our residents that Council officers are working hard on Brexit preparations to make sure our services are not affected.

The Council also remains committed to supporting our local economy and we are here to advise or guide any local businesses that could be affected by Brexit. There's lots of information, guidance and support on our dedicated South and Vale Business Support website at www.svbs.co.uk.

Yours Sincerely,

Cllr Emily Smith

Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council

The Leader of the Council answered each point in turn:

CHAIRMAN

DBC has a permanent webpage and this provides a single source of guidance and the most up to date information to leaving the EU. He said he appreciated that you could only find this information if you type 'Brexit' into the search bar so they are looking at ways to make this information more accessible.

He said they were in the process of writing a leaflet to go in with all the new council tax bills for every household in Dacorum. He proposed that we include a section in the leaflet on this subject.

He explained that CSU had computer terminals for residents, as does the Libraries across the Borough.

The nearest assisted verification service for Dacorum residents is located in Vicarage Road, Watford.

The most common document to be requested from us is council tax bills and we aim to have a turnaround of 14 days.

The customer services team have the required information on the EU Settlement Scheme from the Home Office portal. Staff have been advised to work through the guidance with residents.

He advised that we haven't proposed additional funding to support outreach groups as there is sufficient advice available through the system processes and with agencies such as Citizens Advice Bureau.

Information on the EU Settlement Scheme has been provided to our Housing team.

There are 13 members of Dacorum staff that need to apply for this scheme; they have all been advised of this and HR will support them.

The Mayor advised that Councillor Pringle was entitled to three supplementary questions.

Councillor Pringle asked if they would consider investing in a comprehensive review of the website to think of all the terms people would use to search. Councillor Williams said he had already indicated that they would review the website.

Councillor Pringle asked if the Leader would consider writing a letter similar to the letter above written by Councillor Emily Smith to encourage people to apply for the scheme. Councillor Williams advised he didn't intend to write a letter such as the one by Councillor Emily Smith as he didn't feel it served much purpose and felt that the majority of EU residents in Dacorum would already be aware that they are welcome in our community.

Councillor Pringle asked if the Leader agreed that a comprehensive public information campaign warning all citizens of Dacorum of the risk to vulnerable people is required. Councillor Williams replied no and explained that the Government had a comprehensive programme and that is targeted at those citizens that need to apply. He added that there was another 18 months to apply and was positive that the vast majority of people have already applied and that any vulnerable individuals would be supported. He felt that adding the leaflet in the council tax bills would reach every person/household so they would have the information they needed to apply if they hadn't already done so.

CHAIRMAN

-
2. Councillor Freedman asked the following question in writing to the Leader of the Council:

The government wants to make it compulsory for voters in England, Scotland and Wales to show photo identification before casting their ballots. They say the legislation will “tackle electoral fraud and protect our democracy.”

Elections, including the December General election are carried out by the borough Councils Electoral services team. To quantify the problem that Boris Johnson seeks to solve, I would like more information about electoral fraud in our area.

In the December 2019 General Election in the Borough of Dacorum:

Qi. How many votes were disallowed because it was found the same voter registration had been used twice?

A. None.

Qii. How many people were turned away from voting due to polling station staff being unconvinced the voter was not who they claimed to be?

A. None. Full training is provided to polling station staff before each election and handbooks are supplied so they have the necessary guidance and legislation. No Presiding Officers reported having to resort to these procedures.

Qiii. Of these, how many were turned away because they were unable to produce any ID, and how many because they produced inadequate ID?

A. Under the current legislation and Electoral Commission Guidance, electors at the polling station are not required to produce any form of Identification.

Qiv. How many people were turned away from voting due to presenting at a polling office outside of their allocated station?

A. This information is not recorded. Electors turning up at the wrong polling station would be directed to the correct polling station by the Presiding Officer.

Qv. How many postal votes were rejected due to multiple votes being received from the same voter?

A. None.

Qvi. How many postal votes were rejected due to inability to verify the voters' identity?

A. 197. These would include missing signatures, missing date of birth, mismatched signatures and mismatched date of birth.

Qvii. How many postal votes were rejected for any other reason?

A. 63. This would be for missing ballot papers or missing statements.

CHAIRMAN

Qviii. How many votes were counted that have since been found to have been invalid votes?

A. None. The total number of ballot papers rejected at the count was 207.

Qix. How many invalid (as opposed to intentionally spoiled) votes, either postal or via a polling station were received?

A. All votes cast at the polling station would initially be deemed valid and then included in the count. Any incomplete postal votes would be considered invalid (not spoiled) and would not then have been forwarded to the count.

Qx. What was the total number of valid votes cast across the Borough?

A. 51,272

Qxi. What was the total (%) voter turnout across the Borough?

A. 69.53%

7 BUSINESS FROM THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING

None.

8 CABINET REFERRALS

That the following be approved:

10 December 2019

8.1 CA/121/19 Committee Timetable 2020/21

Decision

To approve the Meeting Timetable for 2020/21 as set out in Appendix A to the Cabinet report.

8.2 CA/122/19 Draft Corporate Plan

Decision

The adoption of the Corporate Plan 2020 to 2025.

14 January 2020

8.3 CA/007/20 Treasury Management 19/20 Mid-Year

Decision

The acceptance of the Cabinet report on mid- year treasury management performance and prudential indicators for 2019/20.

8.4 CA/010/20 Berkhamsted Sports Centre

CHAIRMAN

Decision

That a sum of £65,000 for survey costs to help mitigate potential site risks and develop a more detailed scheme proposal for further approval be agreed.

8.5 CA/011/20 HRA Business Plan

Decision

1. The approval of the updated Housing Revenue Account Business Plan
2. The approval of the revised development programme budgets as set out in Section 8.3 of the Cabinet report

9 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REFERRALS

None.

10 CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

None.

11 CHANGE TO COMMITTEE DATES

None.

12 CONSTITUTION UPDATE

The following update to the Councils Constitution was agreed:

That Council agree to delete paragraph 2.1.3 at page 55 of Part 3 of the Constitution which reads:

“A Member of the Cabinet is excluded from membership of any Regulatory Committee.”

And insert a new clause 2.1.3 to read:

“A Member of the Cabinet is permitted to be a member of any Regulatory Committee but shall not attend any committee meeting which is hearing an appeal or review against a decision which is made by a service which falls within their Portfolio”

Councillor Hollinghurst asked for it to be recorded that he didn't agree with the amendment.

The Meeting ended at 9.40 pm

CHAIRMAN